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Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report, which covers the period from January to December 2014, is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2068 (2012), by which the Council requested that I continue to submit annual reports on the implementation of its resolutions and presidential statements on children and armed conflict.

2. The report highlights recent global trends regarding the impact of armed conflict on children and provides information on grave violations committed against children in 2014. The main activities and initiatives with regard to the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions and the conclusions of its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict are outlined. In line with the resolutions of the Council pertaining to children and armed conflict, the report includes in its annexes a list of parties that engage in the recruitment and use of children, sexual violence against children, the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and/or hospitals and attacks or threats of attacks against protected personnel, in contravention of international law.

3. All information presented in the present report and its annexes has been documented, vetted and verified for accuracy by the United Nations. In situations where the ability to obtain or independently verify information is hampered by such factors as insecurity or access restrictions, it is qualified as such. The preparation of the report and its annexes involved broad consultations within the United Nations, at Headquarters and in the field, and with relevant Member States.

4. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), and in identifying situations that fall within the scope of her mandate, my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict is guided by the criteria found in international humanitarian law and international jurisprudence for determining the existence of an armed conflict. Reference to a situation is not a legal determination, and reference to a non-State party does not affect its legal status.

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II. Addressing the impact of armed conflict on children

A. Trends and developments

5. There were unprecedented challenges in 2014 with regard to the protection of tens of millions of children growing up in situations affected by conflict. In particular, children in several countries affected by major crises, namely, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Israel/State of Palestine, Nigeria, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, were exposed to the most egregious violations. This added to existing violations against children in protracted conflicts, such as in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia. Most recently, the security situation in Yemen deteriorated further with reports, in April 2015, of significant numbers of child casualties.

B. Abductions as an increasing trend

6. Mass abductions of civilians, including children, have become an increasingly prevalent feature of conflict in many situations described in the present report. The abduction of children had primarily been a precursor to other violations, such as killing and maiming, recruitment and use, or sexual violence. In many instances, abducted children were also arbitrarily detained by Governments and armed groups. While these trends continued in 2014, armed groups abducted children in greater numbers and increasingly used abductions as a tactic to terrorize or target particular ethnic groups or religious communities.

7. In Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, over one thousand girls and boys were abducted by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In one incident in the Syrian Arab Republic, ISIL abducted approximately 150 young boys on their way home from having taken school exams in Aleppo. They were released from captivity after a few months, during which they were physically abused, indoctrinated and made to observe violent practices. Towards the end of the year, ISIL issued a document justifying its sexual slavery of Yezidi girls abducted in Iraq. In Nigeria, Boko Haram abducted hundreds of women and girls in major attacks in Chibok and across the country's north-eastern region. Video statements released by Boko Haram indicated that the abductions were in retaliation against the Government for the detention of relatives and served as punishment for schoolchildren attending Western-style schools.

8. The information contained in the present report demonstrates that the increase in the frequency and scale of abductions has resulted in greater protection needs for children. The children require safe release, family tracing, medical, psychological and legal assistance and facilitation of voluntary repatriation in the context of cross-border abductions.

9. The long-term consequences of abductions are of concern. Dominic Ongwen of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was transferred to the International Criminal Court in January 2015. Abducted by LRA in 1989 on his way to school, Dominic Ongwen rose to the rank of major at 18 years of age. His transfer to The Hague 25 years later is a reminder of the long-term consequences of such violations.

10. Rising concerns about abductions were highlighted by Member States in the March 2015 open debate of the Security Council on children and armed conflict. In

the light of those concerns, my Special Representative will explore new ways to respond to the increasing occurrence of abductions. I call upon the Security Council to expand the tools available to child protection actors to gather information and report on the abduction of children, including through adding abductions as a trigger violation for listing within the annexes of this report.

C. Responses to extreme violence

11. Extreme violence rose to unprecedented levels in 2014, leading to a dramatic increase of grave violations against children. Children have been disproportionately affected and were often the direct targets of acts of violence intended to inflict maximum casualties, terrorize entire communities and provoke worldwide outrage.

12. A tactic of extremist groups is the targeting of schools since they fundamentally object to the goal of universal education for children because they are an emblematic target. In other instances, schools located in areas controlled by extremist armed groups have had their curriculum changed to reflect the groups' ideology.

13. The military responses to the threat caused by extreme violence have also raised serious child protection concerns. In a number of situations where extreme violence is prevalent, military operations led by regional or international coalitions or by neighbouring countries have resulted in the killing and maiming of children. Children have also been subjected to sexual violence and recruited and used by pro-Government militias.

14. An area of particular concern related to the response to extreme violence is the deprivation of liberty of children due to their alleged association with extremist groups. Children have been detained on suspicion of being associated with an extremist group without review of the lawfulness of the deprivation of liberty. These children should be treated primarily as victims and their rights protected at all times. At a minimum, Member States should ensure that procedures or trials are consistent with international juvenile justice standards, with deprivation of liberty as a measure of last resort.

15. The reintegration of children recruited and used in extreme violence raises new challenges. Reintegration has always required significant and long-term resources. However, the impact of exposure to the severity of the violence committed in 2014 across a number of situations will cause particularly serious and long-term distress. Comprehensive programmes are needed to address the reintegration needs of these children. Only through concerted action will it be possible to establish measures to mitigate the harm done to them.

16. Responding appropriately to extreme violence is complex, but it is imperative that all responses be conducted in full compliance with international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights law. These international legal obligations are the minimum that must be in place in all national, regional and international responses to security threats. The Security Council, African Union, European Union, League of Arab States, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, coalition Member States and individual Member States should ensure that responses include specific mitigating measures for the protection of children. I also encourage all concerned Governments to ensure that the recruitment and use of children and other grave violations against

children, are criminalized, allegations of violations investigated and perpetrators held to account. It is also critical that military operations be complemented by efforts to address the root causes that lead to the emergence of extremist groups. Recognizing and addressing social deprivation and alienation of communities, strengthening efforts to grant access to education and other key social services will contribute to isolating the leaders of extremist groups through delegitimizing their discourse and reducing the numbers who willingly enlist.

D. Engagement with non-State actors

17. Fifty-one armed groups are listed in the annexes to the present report because they have committed grave violations against children. Engaging with that group of actors is inherently challenging, given their variety, number and often changing nature. The emergence of extremist groups has compounded the challenge. Notwithstanding those limitations, the United Nations has sustained dialogue with armed groups in several situations of conflict during the period under review with the aim of ending and preventing violations, negotiating the separation of children and facilitating their reintegration. As a result of that engagement, the leadership of a number of armed groups have issued command orders to prohibit and sanction child recruitment and use and other grave violations against children.

18. Engaging with armed groups requires a case-by-case approach. My Special Representative has utilized engagements with mediators, special envoys and regional organizations to integrate the protection of children into peacemaking initiatives, such as the Agreement on the cessation of hostilities in the Central African Republic, which was signed in Brazzaville in July by parties to the conflict in the country. This approach has contributed to gaining commitments from a number of non-State actors to end the recruitment and use of children and prevent other grave violations throughout the reporting period.

19. However, the nature of many armed groups listed in the annexes to the present report, combined with limitations on the access of the United Nations, presents challenges for monitoring commitments. While it is commendable when an armed group pledges to better protect children, such commitments need to be translated into concrete and verifiable actions that make a difference in children's lives.

20. With child protection partners in the field, my Special Representative will continue to identify opportunities to engage in dialogue with armed groups, obtain concrete commitments and sign action plans. The sustained and complementary use of multiple tools is needed to accelerate progress in compliance by armed groups with international child protection standards. In order for those tools to be effective, Member States should allow independent access to the United Nations in order to facilitate monitoring and reporting.

E. "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign

21. In March, my Special Representative and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) launched the campaign "Children, Not Soldiers" to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by government security forces by the end of 2016. The campaign generated wide support from Member States, United Nations and civil society partners and provided opportunities for the countries involved to have

an exchange on experiences and best practices. In the campaign's first year, progress was steady. Six of the seven countries concerned — Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen — have signed or recommitted to action plans. I encourage the Sudan to sign an action plan with the United Nations.

22. A first country, Chad, fully complied with the measures detailed in its action plan, and its armed forces were delisted from the annexes to the present report in 2014. Other Governments have enacted laws to criminalize underage recruitment, released children from army ranks, conducted national awareness campaigns, and developed and implemented age-assessment mechanisms.

23. Throughout the coming year, my Special Representative will continue to reach out to Member States concerned with the campaign, the international community, regional organizations and all relevant partners to mobilize political, technical and financial support to address challenges faced by countries in the implementation of their action plan. This is necessary in order to put in place mechanisms strong enough to safeguard the progress accomplished to protect children from recruitment if a new crisis strikes. In the campaign's second year, United Nations efforts and advocacy will be directed to encourage all countries concerned with the campaign that have not yet done so to criminalize and prosecute the recruitment and use of children. Accountability remains far too rare, even in countries that have criminalized the recruitment of children.

24. Putting in place strong age-assessment procedures for troop screening and recruitment is another challenge faced by most countries involved in the campaign. It is an essential, yet often difficult, step to execute accurately, especially in countries lacking well-established national birth registration systems.

25. The release of children found in the ranks of national security forces is an essential step, and must be followed by adequate and properly resourced reintegration services that also take into account the particular needs of girls. Resources must be available for community-based programmes that provide psychosocial assistance and help children build their future through educational and vocational opportunities.

III. Information on grave violations committed against children during armed conflict and progress made by parties on dialogue, action plans and other measures to halt and prevent violations against children

A. Situations on the agenda of the Security Council

Afghanistan

26. The Government of Afghanistan faced sustained security challenges in the reporting period, most notably following the presidential elections. In my previous annual report, I highlighted the significant spike in the killing and maiming of children in Afghanistan. In 2014, the reported number increased by 48 per cent, to 2,502 child casualties.

27. The United Nations documented the recruitment and use of 68 children (65 boys, 3 girls) of which 22 were verified (all boys), one each by the Afghan National Police and the Afghan local police and 20 associated with the Taliban and other armed groups. This marks a decrease in child recruitment and use in Afghanistan compared with 2013, when 97 children were reportedly recruited and used. However, owing to widespread underreporting, these figures do not accurately reflect the situation. In a worrisome trend, the Taliban continued to recruit children to carry out suicide attacks and to plant improvised explosive devices, and used them in active combat and as spies. For example, on 9 February, a 14-year-old suicide bomber detonated explosives near an Afghan National Security Forces checkpoint in Sharan district, injuring six civilians and five national police officers. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.

28. The pilot child protection units in the national police in four provinces reportedly prevented 156 children from enlisting, indicating a potential for a large and beneficial impact if such units are replicated across the country. In addition, the local police reported 55 cases of rejected underage applicants.

29. As at December, according to the Ministry of Justice, 258 boys were held in juvenile rehabilitation centres across the country on national security-related charges, including association with armed groups. Of 105 child detainees interviewed by the United Nations between February 2013 and December 2014, 44 reported having been subjected to ill-treatment or torture.

30. The increase in child casualties included at least 710 children killed and 1,792 injured in 1,091 separate incidents. Armed groups, including the Taliban and the Hizb-e-Islami, were responsible for 1,343 child casualties (392 killed, 951 injured), Afghan national security forces for 396 (126 killed, 270 injured), and international military forces for 38 (24 killed, 14 injured). Cross-border shelling from Pakistan resulted in 57 child casualties (5 killed, 52 injured). The United Nations was unable to attribute 668 child casualties (163 killed, 505 injured), particularly in incidents of crossfire.

31. Ground engagements were the leading cause of child casualties, resulting in the killing of 311 children and injury to 920 others, nearly double the number in 2013. Attacks with improvised explosive devices by armed groups caused 664 child casualties. Suicide attacks resulted in 214 child casualties, up by 80 per cent compared to the previous year. Explosive remnants of war killed or maimed 328 children. Air strikes by international military forces resulted in 38 child casualties, including eight from drone strikes.

32. In nine incidents, eight boys and six girls reportedly were victims of sexual violence. Of these, five cases, affecting four girls and two boys, were verified. Four verified incidents were attributed to the national police, and one incident to a pro-Government militia commander. On a positive note, regarding accountability, a local police member from Laghman Province was sentenced in March to 10 years of imprisonment for sexual assault and attempted rape of a seven-year-old boy.

33. Schools were attacked in 163 verified incidents, including 29 attacks or threats of attack against protected personnel and 28 incidents of placement of improvised explosive devices inside school premises. Several attacks were related to the use of schools as polling stations. A total of 94 incidents were attributed to the Taliban and other armed groups, 1 to international forces and 68 incidents that could not be

attributed. Girls' education was particularly targeted by the Taliban, including the distribution of leaflets with serious threats against students, intimidation of female teachers, attacks on school personnel for not complying with the Taliban's demand to close schools, and attacks on students on their way to school. At least 469 Afghan schools remained closed because of insecurity.

34. At least 10 health-care personnel were killed and 14 were abducted. Health facilities continued to be attacked directly or as collateral damage. A total of 38 verified incidents were attributed to armed groups, including 13 to the Taliban, and 4 to the Afghan national security forces, including forced entries into health facilities in search of alleged armed group elements.

35. The United Nations verified 11 cases of military use of schools by the Taliban (3), Afghan National Army (3), the local police (3), the national police (1), and other Afghan national security forces units (1), as well as 3 incidents of military use of hospitals by the national police and the Taliban.

36. Twenty-four boys and two girls were abducted in 17 separate incidents, resulting in the killing of at least four boys by the Taliban, the rape of two girls by the local police, and the rape of a boy by a pro-Government militia. Overall, the Taliban abducted 15 boys, accusing them of being Government spies.

37. The United Nations verified 72 of 83 reported incidents affecting humanitarian access to children. There were 125 abductions of humanitarian personnel, the killing and injuring of 41, and 9 attacks on humanitarian convoys, including 2 United Nations convoys. Armed groups, notably the Taliban, were responsible for 85 per cent of all verified incidents, including intimidation of humanitarian personnel.

38. In a welcome development, in July, the Government officially endorsed a road map for compliance with the action plan to end and prevent child recruitment into its security forces. Significant progress was made on three of five priority actions, in particular the adoption of a presidential decree criminalizing child recruitment by Government security forces, which came into effect on 2 February 2015. Furthermore, the Ministry of the Interior issued and disseminated a directive prohibiting the use of children at national police and local police checkpoints, including in support roles, stating that the perpetrators would be sanctioned. Efforts also continued to strengthen age assessment procedures and disseminate guidance to recruitment units.

39. Despite the progress achieved, significant efforts are needed by all actors to fully implement the action plan. The lack of services for children rejected from recruitment or released from active service remained a significant concern. Moreover, I urge the Government of Afghanistan to address widespread impunity for violations of children's rights, particularly within the national police and local police, and investigate the allegations of torture. I condemn the grave violations committed against children by armed groups, including the Taliban, the Haqqani Network and Hezb-i-Islami and urge them to immediately end all grave violations against children.

Central African Republic

40. The situation of children in the Central African Republic worsened as fighting between armed groups, including anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka, and attacks targeting civilians continued. In line with its mandate, the United Nations Multidimensional

Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA) supported consultations to revitalize an inclusive reconciliation and political dialogue which resulted in the cessation of hostilities agreement, including commitments to end violations against children, signed in Brazzaville in July.

41. The United Nations verified 464 cases of new recruitment, including 446 by anti-Balaka (86 girls, 360 boys) and 18 boys by ex-Séléka. However, violations are thought to be largely underreported because of lack of access and limited monitoring capacity on the ground.

42. The period was characterized by a sharp increase in the number of documented cases of killing and maiming of children as young as three months old, with 146 killed (109 boys, 37 girls) and 289 injured (182 boys, 107 girls). A total of 58 of the killings were attributed to ex-Séléka, 49 to anti-Balaka, and 20 to unidentified armed men. Children were caught in crossfire, hacked to death with machetes and killed or injured by bullets. For example, in January, four boys between 9 and 10 years of age were beheaded by ex-Séléka in retaliation for an attack against Muslim community members in Bangui. Between January and February, 22 children, including 9 girls, were killed during attacks by anti-Balaka against ex-Séléka and Muslim communities. In August, Muslim youths associated with ex-Séléka attacked the Saint Joseph Cathedral in Bambari, killing 20 children and injuring 4.

43. Rape and other forms of sexual violence against children continue to be of great concern. The rape of 405 girls and 1 boy, between the ages of 7 and 17, were documented throughout the country; 205 by ex-Séléka, 187 by anti-Balaka, 12 by unidentified persons and 2 by the national police. Sexual violence incidents remained largely underreported. Also of concern is the fact that the leadership of both anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka did not take action against identified alleged perpetrators of rape against children when cases were reported to them.

44. The United Nations interviewed several boys following allegations of repeated acts of sexual violence by elements of "Operation Sangaris" in and around the M'Poko camp for displaced persons in Bangui between December 2013 and May 2014. Their national authorities have opened an investigation that is ongoing. The victims have been provided with necessary assistance by the United Nations and local partners. It is of the utmost importance that the perpetrators be held responsible.

45. Both anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka looted schools and hospitals and threatened health personnel, students and teachers. The United Nations documented nine attacks on schools, including four attributed to anti-Balaka, four to ex-Séléka.

46. Five other schools were temporarily used by the International Support Mission to the Central African Republic and "Operation Sangaris" and later vacated. The United Nations also verified nine attacks against hospitals. In addition, many schools and hospitals that were looted, destroyed or damaged in 2013 remained closed.

47. Thirty-four abductions of children (22 boys, 12 girls), some as young as 3 years of age, were verified, marking a decrease compared with 2013, in particular because of the decline of LRA attacks in the Central African Republic. Sixteen abductions were attributed to anti-Balaka, eight to LRA and two to ex-Séléka. In some cases, children were specifically targeted for ransom or as retaliation against communities.

48. A total of 80 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified in Bangui and the east of the country, including 42 attributed to anti-Balaka, 18 to ex-Séléka, and 20 to unidentified armed men. Incidents included shooting and stone-throwing at vehicles, carjacking, attacks on staff at their residences and looting of offices.

49. The United Nations engaged with the anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka leadership to identify and separate children associated with those groups. Efforts resulted in the separation of 2,807 children (2,161 boys, 646 girls) between the ages of 8 and 17, including 2,347 from anti-Balaka and 446 from ex-Séléka.

50. Dialogue was also initiated with the military chains of command of two ex-Séléka factions: the Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de Centafrique (RPRC) and Union pour la paixen la Centrafrique (UPC), resulting in the issuance of command orders by the military leadership of both factions to end the recruitment and use of children. In follow-up to this development, UNICEF provided training to over 400 combatants and officers from both factions. In addition, sensitization workshops were organized for anti-Balaka in Bangui and other south-eastern localities.

51. The collapse of the judicial system and other core functions of the State resulted in widespread impunity allowing grave violations against children to be committed on a large scale. To address the situation, MINUSCA was mandated under Security Council resolution 2149 (2014) to assist the transitional authorities to arrest and bring to justice those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Ministry of Justice and MINUSCA signed a memorandum of understanding establishing urgent temporary measures to restore law and order and fight impunity. In this context, two anti-Balaka members who allegedly raped a 14-year-old girl in November in Bangui were arrested by MINUSCA police and handed over to the national gendarmerie for investigation. As at April 2015, the two individuals were awaiting trial.

Chad

52. The Chadian National Army was delisted from the annex of the previous report (A/66/782-S/2012/61) following the full implementation of the action plan to end the recruitment and use of children, signed with the United Nations in 2011. During the reporting period, no recruitment or use of children by the national army was reported. The United Nations continued to provide support to the Government of Chad, with a particular focus on training, age assessment mechanisms and birth registration.

53. As part of ongoing follow-up, the Government signed a protocol agreement in September with the United Nations regarding the handover of children associated with armed forces or groups. The protocol includes provisions that secure the handover of children to child protection actors, regardless of their country of origin, and ensures adequate protection of children held in detention. Prior to the development of the protocol, 44 children associated with ex-Séléka in the Central African Republic had entered Chad and been arrested. Following joint collaboration among the United Nations, the Government of Chad and a national non-governmental organization (NGO), the children were released and handed over to child protection actors for family reunification and social reintegration. The

protocol is also a valuable tool for the handover of children detained in the context of operations against Boko Haram.

54. A total of 346 national army troops attended child protection sessions and completed the training of trainers. Predeployment training of Chadian peacekeepers continued and a total of 864 soldiers took part before their deployment to the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali. An additional 1,500 troops were trained in Lumia prior to their departure for Mali.

55. Instability in the surrounding countries of the Central African Republic, Libya and the Sudan, as well the threat posed by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin area, continued to have an impact on Chad. More than 150,000 people fled the Central African Republic and thousands of Nigerians, the majority of whom were children, arrived in Chad to escape the conflict. The children, often separated from their families, had experienced distress and were in need of special care. This spillover also affected border communities where child protection services are scarce and the risk of recruitment by armed groups is high. I call upon all stakeholders and the donor community to put in place adequate monitoring and protection mechanisms in southern Chad and in the Lake Chad Basin region to prevent and end violations.

56. I welcome the sustained efforts of the Government of Chad to enhance the protection of children and prevent new violations. The adoption of a Child Protection Code and the Criminal Code would further strengthen the legislative framework. In the context of the Government's participation in peacekeeping operations and in military operations against Boko Haram, I encourage the Government to continue to play a pivotal role in ensuring respect and compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law. In the of the progress made in the implementation of the action plan, the situation of Chad will be removed from the report as of 2016.

Côte d'Ivoire

57. More than three years after the post-electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, the security situation continued to improve, although marked with sporadic incidents of armed attacks, banditry and other violent crimes, particularly along the border with Liberia. The United Nations verified 18 cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence committed by Forces républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire elements against girls aged 2 to 17, mostly in the western part of the country. Since 2007, when the last parties to the conflict were delisted from the annex to my report, the protection of children has continued to improve. In the light of that development, the situation of Côte d'Ivoire will be removed from the report as of 2016.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

58. The situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo remained volatile and witnessed major political and security developments, including a series of military operations against armed groups. Since October, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) increased their attacks against civilians in Beni Territory and committed a series of massacres.

59. The United Nations documented 241 new cases of recruitment (223 boys, 18 girls), while a large backlog of children separated by national partners is still

under verification. Recruitment was carried out by Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) (63), Nyatura (32), Rayia Mutomboki (19), Union des patriotes congolais pour la paix (UPCP) (17), Forces de résistance patriotiques en Ituri (FRPI) (16), LRA (13), Nduma Defence Coalition/Cheka (NDC/Cheka) (13), Mayi Mayi Alliance pour un Congo libre et souverain (APCLS) (7) and other Mayi Mayi groups (61). Seventy-five per cent of those cases occurred in North Kivu. At least 57 children were used as combatants. Of the 18 girls, 8 were victims of sexual violence. One 17-year-old boy was recruited and used in combat by the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) in Rutshuru Territory. He was separated during a screening by the United Nations in a FARDC training camp in Bas-Congo in April.

60. Despite two Government directives, children continued to be arrested and detained for their association with armed groups. The United Nations secured the release of 121 children (110 boys, 11 girls) from FARDC, police and military prosecutor detention centres. Forty per cent of the children reported being subjected to ill-treatment during detention.

61. A total of 80 children (52 boys, 28 girls) were killed and 92 maimed (48 boys, 44 girls), mostly during violent attacks by armed groups targeting civilians. Thirty-eight per cent of child casualties occurred during brutal attacks by ADF in Beni Territory, in which at least 250 persons, including 35 children, were massacred with machetes, knives, hammers or axes. In another significant incident, inter-ethnic violence between the Bafuliru and Barundi/Banyamulenge in June claimed the lives of at least 12 children, including two babies, in Mutarule. Forty children (16 boys, 24 girls) were respectively killed and maimed by explosive remnants of war.

62. The United Nations documented 334 cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence (332 girls, 2 boys), a significant increase compared with 2013. State agents perpetrated 30 per cent of the documented violations (99). The remaining cases were perpetrated by Mayi-Mayi Simba (50), FDLR (39), Nyatura (24), Rayia Mutomboki (23), FRPI (22), APCLS (14), and other armed groups (63).

63. Twenty-two schools were attacked and twelve were used for military purposes, affecting over 31,000 children. In Shabunda Territory, ten schools militarily used by the FARDC (four) and Rayia Mutomboki (six) were destroyed or looted and their materials burned during clashes in April. Other schools were attacked by ADF, FDLR, UPCP and other armed groups. Nineteen hospitals were also attacked or looted by the FARDC (8), Rayia Mutomboki (2), and ADF (2), NDC/Cheka (2), APCLS (2) and unidentified armed groups (3). Following advocacy by the United Nations, two schools used by FARDC to host FDLR surrenders were vacated in September.

64. Armed groups abducted 108 children (65 boys, 43 girls), 55 per cent out of whom were below the age of 15, mostly in Orientale (59) and North Kivu (30). The main perpetrators were LRA (34), ADF (20), Mayi Mayi Simba (18), Rayia Mutomboki (17) and other armed groups (19). At least 11 abductees were used as combatants and 22 girls were subjected to sexual slavery.

65. Seven incidents of denial of humanitarian access were documented in North and South Kivu, perpetrated by ADF (3), FARDC (1) and other armed groups (3). Three NGO staff members and one United Nations staff member were killed and two humanitarian workers abducted by ADF. Challenges to humanitarian access

persist, owing mainly to a volatile security situation, increased criminal activities and ongoing military operations.

66. At least 1,030 children were separated from armed groups (973 boys, 57 girls). Most of them children had been recruited in 2013 (441) and 2012 (220), and 31 per cent were below the age of 15 at the time of their recruitment. A total of 166 children were separated from FDLR, 140 from Nyatura, 124 from Rayia Mutomboki, 97 from FRPI and other armed groups (503). In relation to the response on sexual violence, UNICEF partners assisted 863 child survivors of sexual violence, a major decrease from 2013, owing largely to lack of funding.

67. In August and September, FARDC, with support from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, conducted "Opération sauvetage" to provide medical evacuation and assistance to ADF dependants abandoned following military operations. A total of 71 persons, including 60 children, were rescued. Forty per cent of them had been used as combatants and are receiving reintegration support. Some had sustained bullet wounds and all were severely malnourished.

68. Despite security challenges and instability, the Government consistently demonstrated its commitment and ownership with regard to the implementation of the action plan signed with the United Nations in 2012 to end the recruitment and use of children, by funding and chairing joint coordination mechanisms and ensuring their decentralization to conflict-affected provinces. The Vice-Prime Minister/Minister of Defence also submitted to the United Nations two progress reports on the implementation of the action plan. In July, the President, Joseph Kabila appointed Jeannine Mabunda Liyoko as his Personal Adviser on sexual violence and child recruitment. With United Nations support, the Government also conducted awareness-raising activities. From 30 November to 4 December, the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo and travelled to Kinshasa and Goma. The Working Group welcomed the progress made by the Government in implementing the action plan and encouraged it to sustain its efforts, particularly aspects related to the fight against impunity and sexual violence.

69. Progress was made in the fight against impunity with the arrest and prosecution of 61 individuals (46 FARDC, 10 Police nationale congolais, 5 leaders of armed groups). Thirty-five were convicted and received sentences ranging from two years to life imprisonment, including Lieutenant Colonel Bedi Mobuli Engangela, alias "106" and General Jerome Kakwavu, two of the five high-ranking FARDC officers. All but one were convicted for the crime of sexual violence against children. Four armed group leaders are currently awaiting trial, including on charges of child recruitment. FARDC Brigadier General Goda Supka Emery was indicted by the High Military Court in Kinshasa with crimes against humanity and war crimes, including the recruitment of children. The President also promulgated an Amnesty Law in February, excluding the crimes of recruitment of children and sexual violence from amnesty.

70. I welcome these positive developments and encourage the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to sustain its efforts to end and prevent all violations against children.

Iraq

71. The deadliest year in Iraq since 2007 was 2014. The United Nations received reports of systematic and widespread violations of international law, including executions and targeted killings, abductions, sexual violence and forced recruitment of children in the large swaths of territory in the country controlled by ISIL and associated armed groups. Beginning in June, an international coalition led by the United States of America conducted airstrikes on ISIL positions in support of the Government. Fighting between the Iraqi Security Forces, including its associated militias and Peshmerga forces, and ISIL and its associated armed groups, included the indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas by all parties, resulting in a sharp increase in the killing and maiming of children. Notwithstanding significant underreporting, 880 incidents of grave violations against children were reported, of which 711 were verified, marking a significant increase compared to 2013.

72. The United Nations verified the recruitment of at least 67 boys by ISIL in nine incidents. Children reportedly continued to patrol alongside adults and to man checkpoints in Ninewa, Salah al-Din, and Diyala governorates. On 5 September, in Salah al-Din, ISIL forcibly recruited 40 boys during Friday prayers. An unknown number of children were recruited by the pro-Government Popular Mobilization Forces in all conflict areas, as well as in Baghdad and Basra. Children wearing military uniforms and carrying weapons were spotted daily alongside those groups. For example, the United Nations witnessed children in the Hurriya area of Baghdad patrolling with militia convoys in July. Boys as young as 10 years old were recruited and used by self-defence groups supporting Iraqi security forces in the town of Amerli, Salah al-Din. Children, including girls, were reportedly associated with Yezidi self-defence groups fighting alongside Kurdish Peshmerga and Turkmen-based self-defence groups in Ninewa and Kirkuk, and with Sunni tribal-based militias supporting ISF in Ramadi. The lack of clear recruitment procedures, including age verification and disciplinary measures by Iraqi authorities remains a cause of grave concern. It is of concern that the draft National Guard law that was presented to the Council of Representatives in early March includes exceptions related to the age of recruitment, which would allow children associated with the pro-Government militias to join the National Guard.

73. As at December, at least 391 children, including 16 girls, held in detention facilities, were indicted or convicted of terrorism-related charges for their alleged association with armed groups under the Anti-Terrorism Act (2005). At least eight children, including two girls, were detained by Kurdistan Regional Government authorities under the Anti-Terrorism Law 3 (2006). Detention periods ranged from two months to more than three years.

74. The United Nations recorded the killing of 679 children (121 girls, 304 boys, 254 of unknown gender) and injury to 505 others (111 girls, 282 boys, 112 of unknown gender) in 498 incidents (of which 356 could be verified), representing the highest number of documented child casualties since the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism in 2008. At least 87 children were killed and 211 injured in improvised explosive device and suicide attacks. On 2 September in Salah al-Din, 16 children (5 girls, 11 boys), between 8 and 16 years of age, were killed and 8 children (3 boys, 5 girls) were injured in an Iraqi security forces airstrike targeting ISIL. On 17 June, in Ba'qouba district, Diyala, the Shi'ite militia Al Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq raided Al-Mafraq police station, killing 52 detainees,

including 4 boys. On 22 August, in Sa'diya district, Diyala, 16 boys, as young as 8 years of age, were killed by armed elements, allegedly from the Popular Mobilization Forces, during Friday prayers in the Musaba Bin Umeir mosque. In June, the advance of ISIL increased constraints on the delivery of humanitarian assistance, often with devastating effects on children. For example, sources indicated that, in August, at least 45 Yezidi children besieged on Sinjar Mountain by ISIL died from shortages of food and water.

75. A total of 67 attacks on schools and protected personnel and 51 attacks on hospitals and protected personnel were reported, of which 84 were verified, resulting in the killing of 56 children and injury of 42. Twenty-eight schools were the targets of improvised explosive devices, including when they were being used as polling stations during parliamentary elections in April. In addition, 10 incidents of attacks or threats of attacks on teachers by ISIL were reported. Another 23 schools in Anbar, Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Diyala were affected by military use by ISF and ISIL and by the fighting between the two sides and supporting militias. Three schools were militarily used by ISIL in the Anbarand Diyala governorates, two by ISF in Salah al-Din and one by Peshmerga forces in Mosul. For example, on 11 November, in Beiji, Salah al-Din, the vacated Industrial High School was demolished by improvised explosive devices allegedly planted by ISIL since it had been previously used as a military base by the Iraqi security forces.

76. Al-Fallujah General Hospital in Anbar governorate alone was subjected to shelling in 17 separate attacks. In four incidents, hospitals were targeted by improvised explosive devices. In the Ninewa and Kirkuk governorates, at least two doctors were targeted by ISIL for refusing to treat injured fighters. For example, on 3 March, in Kirkuk, an improvised explosive device targeted the home of a physician previously threatened by ISIL, injuring his two children and 13 other civilians. At least seven hospitals in Salah al-Din, Ninewa, and Kirkuk were used by ISIL and pro-Government militias to treat their injured.

77. At least 1,297 children (685 girls, 612 boys) were abducted in 320 incidents, marking the highest number since 2008 and despite significant underreporting. Almost all incidents were perpetrated in August by ISIL against the Yezidi community in Sinjar. Children were taken in groups with their families and detained in schools, prisons and airports. Girls above the age of 12 were separated from their families and either sold in ISIL-controlled areas in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, or retained, including for sexual slavery. The men and boys were allegedly forced to convert to Islam and join ISIL. Multiple sources in the Syrian Arab Republic reported in December that Yezidi girls had been moved to Raqqa to be sold as sex slaves. The number of Yezidi children abducted is indicative of targeting by ISIL of minority communities, with Turkmen, Shabak and Christian children also reportedly abducted in large numbers. Lack of access to conflict-affected areas or the fear of families in reporting abductions of children seriously impeded the documentation of cases.

78. United Nations interactions with national and local authorities on child protection continued despite the deterioration in the security situation and political instability. However, it remains a serious source of concern that the Government of Iraq is not responding to the disproportionate effect of armed conflict on children. Urgent measures are required in relation to the detention of children under terrorism charges, legislative reform, including the criminalization of the recruitment and use

of children, the association of children with the Popular Mobilization Forces, as well as the implementation of policies and programmes for the rehabilitation of children affected by conflict. The United Nations stands ready to support the Government and encourages the establishment of a formal interministerial committee to facilitate regular information-sharing on and the response to grave violations against children.

Israel and State of Palestine

79. In 2014, the security situation significantly deteriorated in the State of Palestine with another escalation of hostilities in Gaza and a significant increase of tensions throughout the West Bank, with devastating impacts for children. Palestinian and Israeli children continued to be affected by the prevailing situation of military occupation, conflict and closure.

80. The reporting period saw a dramatic increase in the number of children killed and injured, especially in Gaza. At least 561 children (557 Palestinian; 4 Israeli) were killed and 4,271 injured (4,249 Palestinian; 22 Israeli).

81. In the West Bank, 13 Palestinian boys, aged 11 to 17 years, were killed. Twelve were killed by Israeli security forces live ammunition (11) and "sponge round" bullets (1) during demonstrations and military search and arrest operations, and one boy was killed by settlers. On 15 May, two Palestinian boys, aged 16 and 17 years, respectively, were shot and killed with live ammunition during clashes with Israeli soldiers near Beituniya checkpoint. Reports indicate that the children killed by the Israeli security forces did not appear to have posed a lethal threat. On 19 March, a 14-year-old boy was fatally shot by the Israel security forces when crossing the West Bank Barrier. In another example, a ten-year-old Palestinian boy was fatally shot in the back with live ammunition by the Israeli security forces in Al-Fawwar camp. The Government of Israel reports that investigations were or are being carried out on these cases.

82. On 13 June, three Israeli youths, two of whom were 16-year-old children, were abducted, and on 30 June, their bodies were found near Halhul in northern Hebron. The Government of Israel reported that three Hamas members were identified as suspects, two of whom were killed during a fire fight with the Israeli security forces. It was also reported that hundreds of Palestinians were arrested in the West Bank during large search operations carried out by the Israeli security forces between 13 and 30 June. On 2 July, a 16-year-old Palestinian boy was abducted in Shu'fat and burned alive in apparent retaliation for the kidnapping and killing of the Israeli youths. Three Israeli civilians, two of them under the age of 18 years, were arrested and charged.

83. Of the 1,218 children injured in the West Bank, more than half were under the age of 12 and 91 per cent were injured during confrontations in Hebron and East Jerusalem, with 231 of them hit by live ammunition and 530 by rubber-coated bullets.

84. Violence committed by Israeli settlers, and related incidents involving the Israeli security forces, remained high, resulting in the injury of 63 Palestinian children. For example, on 18 April, a group of settlers shielded by the Israeli security forces reportedly attacked the Urif Secondary School for Boys near Nablus, which resulted in the injury of 12 students from stones, bullets and a gas canister.

The school was attacked in four instances, reportedly by Israelis living in the Yizhar settlement.

85. Sixteen Israeli children, (14 boys and 2 girls) were injured in the West Bank as a result of stones and Molotov cocktail thrown and shots fired at vehicles by Palestinians.

86. In Gaza, civilians, including children, have borne the brunt of the third major military offensive in Gaza in six years, namely, "Operation Protective Edge". In Gaza, in the 50-day period between 8 July and 26 August, at least 540 Palestinian children were killed (340 boys and 200 girls between the ages of 1 week and 17 years, with almost 70 per cent of that number being younger than 12 years). The number of child casualties exceeds the combined number of Palestinian children killed during the two previous escalations. Hundreds of homes, some of which belonged to alleged members of armed groups, were directly hit by Israeli airstrikes. The Israeli bombardments resulted in the destruction of or severe damage to residential properties, schools and hospitals, causing civilian deaths and injuries. This is in addition to reports of Palestinian civilians and civilian objects being directly hit in circumstances where there was allegedly no rocket fire or armed group activity in the vicinity. This raises serious concern over the observance of the rules of international humanitarian law concerning the conduct of hostilities, including the principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality.

87. On average, between 8 July and 26 August, more than 10 children were killed daily in Gaza. More than 80 per cent of them were killed between 17 July and 5 August during the ground incursion by the Israeli security forces. At least 13 children in Gaza were reportedly killed as a result of rockets fired by Palestinian armed groups towards Israel that fell inside Gaza.

88. At least 2,955 Palestinian children were injured in Gaza. Preliminary estimates indicate that up to 1,000 of them will be permanently disabled. Apart from the July-August Israeli military operation, another 76 children were injured.

89. On 16 July, four children, 9 to 11 years of age, were killed on a beach in Gaza City. According to eye witnesses and video footage, one child hid in an empty building and was killed by an air strike. The other three children were hit by a shell fired from the sea, which killed them and injured two others. No military targets could be identified in the apparently calm area and no rockets had been fired towards Israel from that location at that time.

90. On 20 July, an Israeli air strike hit a residential building in Bani Suhaila, killing 25 family members, including 19 children and 3 pregnant women. Surviving family members testified that they had received no prior warning from the Israeli security forces. The Military Advocate General opened a criminal investigation.

91. Palestinian children were also killed in drone strikes. On 10 July, a five-year-old boy was hit by a missile fired by a drone in Deir Al Balah. On 23 July, a drone killed a nine-year-old boy seeking shelter in Beit Lahiya. At the time of the attacks, there were no reports of military activity near the homes.

92. The indiscriminate firing of rockets by Palestinian armed groups from populated areas in Gaza towards Israeli population centres endangered both the civilian population in Israel and the Palestinian civilians in Gaza. This raises concern over the observance of the rules of international humanitarian law on the

conduct of hostilities, particularly the principles of distinction and precaution. On 22 August, a four-year-old Israeli boy was killed by mortar shelling in Sha'ar Hanegev region. At least six Israeli children between 3 months and 17 years of age were reportedly gravely injured as a result of rocket fire from Gaza. In addition, 159 children were injured on the way to shelters, 33 were injured by building debris, and 18 were injured in traffic incidents after the activation of warning sirens. In addition, on 22 October, a three-month-old Israeli baby, among others, was killed when a Palestinian man deliberately drove his car into a light rail train station in East Jerusalem.

93. Allegations of nine instances of child recruitment and use by Palestinian armed groups, including by the Al-Qassam Brigades, were reported. The following five cases were verified: on 21 July, a 16-year-old Palestinian boy was injured and captured during an ambush by the Al-Qassam Brigades on Israeli forces near Kibbutz Nir Am/Erez. Two boys aged 17 years were killed in targeted attacks by Israeli drone strikes in Jabaliya and Khan Younis on 12 and 14 July, both reportedly associated with Palestinian armed groups. On 22 July, a 16-year-old Palestinian boy, reportedly recruited by the Al-Qassam Brigades, disappeared and his family was informed of his death on 26 July. A video shows the boy giving his last statement, including his full name. On 2 August, a 17-year-old boy who was reportedly used by the Al-Qassam Brigades, was killed in the shelling of his home by Israeli security forces. A video uploaded by Al-Qassam Brigades shows him undergoing military training and giving his last testament.

94. On 23 July, a 17-year-old Palestinian boy was taken from his home near Khan Younis by the Israeli security forces and forced at gunpoint to search for tunnels. The boy reported being interrogated, abused and used to extract information about Hamas members.

95. Palestinian children continued to be arrested and detained by the Israeli security forces and prosecuted in juvenile military courts. According to the Israeli Prison Service, 151 children between 14 and 17 years of age were in Israeli military detention for alleged security violations at the end of December. A monthly average of 188 children were in Israeli military custody.

96. The United Nations obtained the affidavits of 122 Palestinian children from the West Bank, who had been detained by the Israeli security forces, in which they stated that they had been subjected to ill-treatment, such as beatings, being hit with sticks, being blindfolded, being kicked and being subjected to verbal abuse and threats of sexual violence. At least 700 children were arrested in East Jerusalem, 70 of whom were under the age of 13 years. The United Nations received 18 affidavits from Palestinian children reporting ill-treatment by the Israeli police and the border police.

97. Since February, IDF Central Command for the West Bank have implemented a pilot summons procedure to halt the practice of night arrests and tackle some of the protection issues. There are concerns regarding the delivery of summonses at night, arrests following appearance at police stations and reports of violations during the interrogation process.

98. In Gaza, between 8 July and 26 August, at least 262 schools were damaged in Israeli air strikes. Three public schools were completely destroyed and at least 23 were severely damaged. In addition, 274 kindergartens were damaged.

99. Of the 83 school buildings of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) that were damaged owing to Israeli airstrikes and shelling nearby, 7 being used as shelters were hit either directly or by air strikes or shelling, resulting in the death of at least 42 persons, including 16 children, and in the injury of about 230 persons. In May, the United Nations shared a list of its facilities with the Government of Israel, which was further discussed with government entities in July. During hostilities in July and August, UNRWA provided the Israeli authorities with real-time information identifying installations that were being used as designated emergency shelters and places of temporary refuge. Despite such information, on 24 July, the UNRWA Beit Hanoun Elementary Coed A and D school, which at the time was sheltering some 450 internally displaced persons, was hit by IDF mortar fire, resulting in the death of at least 12 persons, including 6 children, and in the injury of more than 90 others. The location of the school had been provided to Israeli authorities by United Nations staff on 12 separate occasions over the seven days leading up to the incident, including the day of the incident itself. Intense military activity was reported in the vicinity of the school prior to, but not at the time of, the incident. IDF launched a criminal investigation.

100. On 30 July, artillery projectiles struck the UNRWA Jabalia Elementary Girls A and B School, killing at least 17 persons, including one United Nations staff member, and injuring 99 persons sheltering inside. The school's coordinates had been formally conveyed to the Israeli authorities on at least 28 occasions over a 14-day span, including the night before the incident.

101. On 25 August, two Government schools were attacked and destroyed by air strikes. In addition to the July and August incidents, seven instances of attacks on schools were reported throughout the rest of the year.

102. During its routine inspections, UNRWA discovered that weapons or weapons components had been placed by Palestinian armed elements in three vacant UNRWA schools in Gaza.

103. In the West Bank, in 21 cases, the Israeli security force entered and used schools. On five occasions in the West Bank, UNRWA school premises were entered without the permission of the United Nations.

104. On 10 November, the Secretary-General decided to establish a United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry into ten incidents in which death or injury occurred and damage was done to, or weaponry was found at, United Nations facilities during the conflict.

105. Between 8 July and 26 August, 17 of the 32 hospitals in Gaza were damaged by Israeli air strikes or shelling. One hospital and 58 primary health clinics were destroyed. For instance, on 21 July, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital was directly hit numerous times, killing three persons and injuring 40. Reportedly, no warning of the attack was given. The Israeli security forces claimed that the target was a cache of missiles in the hospital's immediate vicinity. That attack raises concerns about observance of the special protection accorded to hospitals under international law.

106. Three hits on schools were recorded in Israel by rockets fired from Gaza by Palestinian armed groups, resulting in damage to the school facilities, with no fatalities.

107. The blockade of Gaza since June 2007 continued to take a heavy toll on humanitarian assistance for more than 80 per cent of the families in Gaza. It has impacted the provision of health services, which suffered from a lack of adequate equipment, instruments and essential medicine. The Erez checkpoint with Israel and the Rafah crossing with Egypt, serving 1.7 million people, remain the only two humanitarian access points.

108. The Military Advocate General requested the IDF fact-finding and assessment mechanism to examine a number of "exceptional incidents" that occurred during the Gaza crisis. As at April 2015, the Military Advocate General had conducted an initial examination of more than 100 incidents and opened criminal investigations for 13. Since the focus of the Mechanism is on "exceptional incidents", concerns remain over its not addressing failures to ensure respect for international law at the policy level and the State's duty to investigate all incidents, policies or tactics that may violate international law.

109. The Israeli and the Palestinian authorities have an obligation to ensure that allegations of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law are promptly, effectively, independently, and impartially investigated, and that those responsible are brought to justice.

110. Israel has repeatedly claimed that its military operation in Gaza was in response to rocket fire into Israel and that it was conducted in full compliance with its international obligations. However, I am deeply alarmed at the extent of grave violations suffered by children as a result of Israeli military operations in 2014. The unprecedented and unacceptable scale of the impact on children in 2014 raises grave concerns about Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law, notably the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in attack, and respect for international human rights law, particularly in relation to excessive use of force. It is of particular concern that "Operation Protective Edge" was the third major Israeli military operation in Gaza within six years. The cumulative impact on children and the civilian population in general of these military operations, and the ongoing military occupation in the State of Palestine, is devastating. As indicated earlier in the present report, the number of Palestinian children killed (557) is the third highest in 2014, after the number of children killed in (a) Afghanistan (710) and (b) Iraq (679), and before the number of children killed in (c) Syrian Arab Republic (368) and (d) Darfur (197). The number of schools damaged or destroyed in the State of Palestine (at least 543) was the highest recorded number of all situations in 2014.

111. I urge Israel to take concrete and immediate steps, including by reviewing existing policies and practices, to protect children, to prevent the killing and maiming of children, and to respect the special protections afforded to schools and hospitals. An essential measure in that regard is ensuring accountability for perpetrators of alleged violations. I further urge Israel to engage in a dialogue with my Special Representative and the United Nations to ensure that there is no recurrence in grave violations against children.

Lebanon

112. Lebanon was heavily affected by insecurity and the existing trends of improvised explosive device attacks, urban clashes and cross-border shelling from the Syrian Arab Republic continued. Direct attacks by armed groups on the Lebanese Armed Forces resulted in violent clashes, particularly in the Arsal, Bekaa

governorate and in the Tripoli, North governorate. The United Nations collected credible information on children as young as 14 years of age who had joined armed factions in Palestinian camps and armed parties operating in the Syrian Arab Republic, particularly in border areas. The United Nations also received verified reports of at least 25 boys arrested by the Lebanese armed forces during anti-terrorism raids, mostly conducted in Arsal and Tripoli between August and December, and kept in pretrial detention together with adults under military jurisdiction for national security offences. In mid-January 2015, the children were tr nsferred to the area of the prison hosting children.

113. According to consistent reports from different sources, at least 17 boys and three girls were killed and four boys injured, mostly by gunshots or stray bullets, during armed clashes in urban areas. Six of them, three Lebanese and three Syrian, were reportedly killed during shelling by the Syrian Air Force on Arsal on 17 January. A 15-year-old Syrian refugee boy was summarily executed by al-Nusra elements in Arsal in June.

114. School facilities and learning activities were affected by armed violence, particularly in Tripoli surrounding areas, where 97 schools were used as shelters, depriving at least 20,000 students of education. Sporadic incidents of armed violence also affected the provision of humanitarian assistance.

115. As a result of an increase in the identification of children associated with armed groups, relevant authorities, civil society and the United Nations carried out advocacy to ensure that the children received support, including access to protection and reintegration programmes. In that context, I welcome the signing by the Government of a workplan to prevent and respond to the association of children with armed violence and encourage that the provisions be fully implemented. Finally, I urge Lebanon to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict which it signed in 2002.

Libya

116. The security situation in Libya deteriorated sharply in 2014, particularly in the fourth quarter of the year. Internal armed conflicts erupted in various parts of the country, including in its two largest cities, Tripoli and Benghazi. Humanitarian and monitoring access remained severely limited owing to security reasons and relief operations were suspended almost entirely following the relocation of United Nations international staff out of the country.

117. Although no verified information on the recruitment and use of children was available, concerns persisted over the association of children with armed militias. Furthermore, in May, during "Operation Dignity" in eastern Libya, forces loyal to General Khalifa Haftar allegedly detained dozens of males, possibly also children, based on their nationality, political or religious affiliation. This reportedly included a 17-year-old boy, who had allegedly been detained with three other youths, and who was tortured and died in custody in Benghazi.

118. The United Nations received numerous reports of indiscriminate shelling by all parties to the conflict, as well as of the deliberate destruction of homes in Warshafana and Benghazi. Following the escalation of the conflict in May, the

United Nations received reports of about 30 children killed across the country, but the actual number is likely to be underreported.

119. The shelling of hospitals in Tripoli and Benghazi severely affected children's access to health care. Both the Al-Afya Hospital and the Tripoli Medical Centre were hit by shells in July and August, respectively. In November, four medical staff were reportedly abducted from the Hawari General Hospital but managed to escape, while another was shot dead, resulting in the resignation of many staff.

120. Reports of the use of schools and hospitals by armed groups were also a cause for concern. For instance, in Benghazi, Ansar al-Shari'a reportedly took control of the General Hospital and placed snipers on the roof. Many schools in eastern Libya had been closed since May due to the security situation, including those hosting internally displaced persons.

121. In the West, armed groups, either affiliated with the Libya Dawn coalition or rival armed groups from Warshafana or Zintan, abducted children in the aftermath of the fighting in Tripoli, as well as during the fighting in Warshafana. In addition, human rights defenders reportedly received threats from armed groups that their children would be abducted and killed if they did not stop their work.

Lord's Resistance Army (Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan)

122. During the reporting period, LRA was in survival mode but continued to engage in attacks on civilians, looting and kidnapping. A total of 13 children were recruited, mostly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Abduction of children in LRA-affected countries remained the most significant violation. A total of 42 cases were reported in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, many of those children were released immediately after being used to carry looted items. Others were held in captivity by LRA for three to four days before either being released or escaping. The United Nations continued to provide psychosocial assistance and support to family reunification in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Uganda for the 180 children and young mothers who escaped or were released by LRA. The absence of long-term reintegration programmes for child returnees remained a challenge to the sustainability of those efforts. Owing to the decrease in LRA activity, the present section will be removed from the 2016 report if the current trends continue, and the violations will be reported in the relevant country sections.

Mali

123. Owing to repeated violations of the ceasefire agreement signed by the Government of Mali and the two coalitions of armed groups — the Coordination and the Platform — the security situation deteriorated considerably in northern Mali, especially after the resumption of hostilities in Kidal in May. In that context, the monitoring and verification of violations against children remained difficult and, therefore, violations are estimated to be underreported.

124. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 84 children within the ranks of Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad (MNLA), Haut Conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad (HCUA), Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad (MAA)-Sidati, MAA-Ould Sidi Mohamed and Groupe d'autodéfense Touaregs Imghad et alliés

(GATIA) in the regions of Kidal, Timbuktu, Gao and Mopti. In addition, allegations were received indicating that hundreds of children are currently associated with armed groups and engaged in hostilities, but the information could not be verified.

125. In accordance with the protocol on the release and reintegration of children associated with the armed forces and armed groups of 1 July 2013, four children detained under security charges were released. However, nine children remained in detention in Bamako for alleged association with armed groups, some for as long as two years. In June, the Ministry of Justice appointed a focal point to work with the United Nations on this issue.

126. The killing of nine children and the injuring of 23 were verified. Explosive remnants of war claimed all but one life and injured 21 children in the Mopti, Gao and Kidal regions. The widespread use of explosive remnants of war is of great concern since armed groups have left behind many remnants that have contaminated areas, mostly around Gao.

127. Thirty-eight incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence against girls were perpetrated by MNLA (6), Malian Defence and Security Forces (4) and unidentified armed elements (28) in Gao and Timbuktu regions. Reporting on sexual violence remained challenging, owing to fear of reprisals, lack of medical and judicial capacity and services in certain areas and preference for settlements outside judicial proceedings.

128. The United Nations verified one attack against a school in the Gao region in May. There were 20 cases of military use of schools, mainly attributed to MNLA and to joint troops of MNLA, HCUA, MAA-Coordination, and Coalition du peuple de l'Azawad. Nearly 60 per cent of the schools militarily used are located in Gao, while the others are in Kidal, Timbuktu, and Mopti. In the region of Kidal, almost all schools remained closed. Peacekeepers of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali used three schools in Gao city, Ansongo Cercle and Tabankort. In December, the Gao vocational school was vacated and the United Nations is currently refurbishing it. The use of one health centre by MNLA since March was documented in Ménaka, in the Gao region.

129. Reports of abduction of girls aged 12 to 16 years by unidentified individuals were also received, mostly in the context of clashes between the Peulh and Dogon communities.

130. Twenty-four incidents of denial of humanitarian access severely affecting the delivery of humanitarian assistance were verified but the perpetrators could not be identified.

131. Despite some initial progress made to address impunity for violations against children, slow restoration of state authority, including the reestablishment of a functioning judiciary in northern Mali, remained of great concern. Moreover, at least two suspected perpetrators of sexual violence were released from detention without being charged, as part of confidence-building measures within the framework of the peace negotiations.

132. The United Nations engaged with armed groups, such as MAA-Ould Sidi Mohamed and GATIA in Tabankort, MNLA and HCUA in Kidal, the leadership of the Coordination des mouvements et forces patriotiques de résistance II (CMFPR-II) in Timbuktu, and the joint troops of MNLA and MAA-Sidati in Ber. The latter

engagement resulted in the signing of local command orders that prohibit all six grave violations against children. In September, the United Nations also conducted a screening of the MAA-Sidati and MNLA joint troops stationed in Ber, and identified five children aged between 15 and 17 years and two young adults who had been recruited as children. In line with advocacy efforts by my Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, I call upon all parties involved in the inter-Malian peace process to take into consideration specific provisions to end and prevent violations against children in the peace agreement and its implementation.

Myanmar

133. Armed clashes between Government armed forces (Tatmadaw) and ethnic armed groups continued in Kachin, Northern Shan and, to a lesser extent, in Kayin State. By December, growing tensions between the Government and armed groups were negatively affecting progress towards a national ceasefire agreement. In October, four Karen armed groups, including the Karen National Liberation Army and the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army formed the Kawthoolei Armed Forces Alliance, allegedly in response to increased Tatmadaw operations.

134. A total of 357 cases of child recruitment and use by the Tatmadaw were reported through the Country Task Force-operated phone line, the forced labour complaint mechanism of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and community monitoring. At least 27 of the children, as young as 14 years of age, were newly recruited in 2014. Children were either enlisted owing to economic circumstances and family problems, or were deliberately tricked or forced into joining. The Government-led awareness campaign launched in November 2013 resulted in an increase in reports to the United Nations of child recruitment.

135. The United Nations received reports that children were deployed to the front line as combatants and in support roles and reported 15 such cases to the Tatmadaw, after which nine children were discharged and the others removed from the front line. A total of 389 boys and young males recruited as children were released from the Tatmadaw. Those released received reintegration assistance from the United Nations and its partners in collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare.

136. Detention of children as "deserters" remained a concern. Of the 53 documented cases of children escaping from the Tatmadaw, 13 were arrested on charges of desertion, with cases increasing towards the end of the year. The United Nations also received a worrisome report of a 16-year-old boy who had allegedly committed suicide while associated with the Tatmadaw in a battalion in Kayah State.

137. In addition to children recruited into the formal ranks of the Tatmadaw, several incidences of informal association of children were recorded, including as porters and scouts. For example, a 12-year-old boy from Chin State was approached by a soldier and taken to eastern Shan State where he was forced to carry out camp management tasks for five months. In Rakhine State, two battalions have been using a 16-year-old boy for support duties one day per week under abusive work conditions since he was 11. Up to 50 children were used by the same battalions.

138. Children also continued to be recruited by armed groups, including through abductions. For example, the United Nations verified five reports of children associated with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). On 12 March, two girls, aged 15 and 16 years, were abducted by two KIA elements in Mansi Township.

After four days in captivity, they were asked to join KIA in support roles. In another incident, a 12-year-old boy was allegedly used as a combatant by KIA and was injured during a firefight with the Tatmadaw in Namkhan. Owing to access issues and limited capacity, the United Nations was largely unable to monitor the presence of children in armed groups.

139. Three children were injured in Kachin and northern Shan States and one child was reportedly killed in crossfire. For example, on 29 July, two boys, aged 16 and 17 years, were injured in shelling during clashes between the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Tatmadaw. According to a credible report, on 28 July, a 16-year-old boy was allegedly killed by the Tatmadaw because of his perceived association with the KIA in northern Shan State.

140. In the absence of a peace agreement, demining and marking explosive remnants of war remained impossible and children continued to be maimed and killed. For example, a 17-year-old boy stepped on a landmine in Kayin State and lost his right leg and injured his left leg seriously. In Mansi township, the KIA allegedly used civilians and internally displaced persons to clear areas of landmines. Of particular concern are landmines laid by the Tatmadaw and KIA in close proximity to schools in Kachin and northern Shan States.

141. The United Nations verified the rape of a 14-year-old mentally challenged girl in northern Shan State by a Tatmadaw private who was initially convicted by a military tribunal for neglecting his duty. Following pressure from civil society, the case was transferred to a civilian court, which sentenced the soldier to 13 years in prison for raping a minor.

142. The Tatmadaw continued to use a vacated school building in Bhamo, Kachin State. Also in Kachin, the Alen Bum boys' dormitory in Laiza was used by KIA-affiliated militia elements as a training facility during summer. After advocacy by the United Nations, KIA instructed the militia to vacate the school and committed itself in writing to prohibit its military use.

143. Humanitarian access to areas outside of Government control in Kachin and northern Shan States improved compared to the previous reporting period, but remained severely restricted, owing also to administrative delays. Twenty-eight cross-line missions provided assistance to approximately 30,000 persons.

144. Positive steps have been taken by the Government to advance the implementation of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children. This included the regular discharge of children from the Tatmadaw, regular review meetings with the United Nations to expedite discharges, strengthened training efforts to sensitize Tatmadaw troops and, in September, the endorsement of a workplan for full implementation of the action plan. In January, the United Nations was granted monitoring access with 72-hour notice to the Border Guard Forces and experienced increased access to Tatmadaw facilities in 11 monitoring visits. The Government and ILO have also been actively cooperating to eliminate forced labour, including recruitment and use, by 2015. Despite progress made, children continue to be present in the Tatmadaw ranks. I urge the Government to take action to prevent recruitment and to exercise due diligence to ensure that children escaping from the Tatmadaw are not arrested as "deserters". Prevention of child recruitment, as well as oversight mechanisms at all stages of the recruitment process, need to be strengthened urgently.

Somalia

145. The security situation remained extremely volatile, particularly in south-central Somalia, leading to displacement of more than 80,000 persons. The reporting period witnessed a gradual build-up of joint operations by the Somalia National Army and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), driving Al-Shabaab out of key towns in southern and central regions.

146. A total of 1,870 violations against children were documented, affecting 1,482 boys and 250 girls, with 806 out of 893 incidents verified. While the numbers represent a substantial reduction compared with 2013, the decline is largely attributable to the reduced capacity and access to verify incidents.

147. The recruitment and use of 819 children (779 boys, 40 girls) by Al-Shabaab (437), national army and allied militia (197), Ahl Al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (109) and other armed elements (76) was documented. Of particular concern was the ongoing recruitment and use of children by clan militias. Al-Shabaab sustained a campaign of recruitment targeting children and youth in mosques and schools, for example, recruiting 82 children in mosques or during religious events. Reports were also received of five boys used by AMISOM in support functions.

148. The detention of children in Somalia remained a concern, with 286 children (277 boys, nine girls) detained by the national army and other security forces (229), Al-Shabaab (44) and other armed groups (4). Seven of the nine girls were kept in Al-Shabaab custody. Of the children detained by government security forces, many were arrested following house searches and security operations and most were released a few days after the arrest. Of concern is the situation of children held at the Serendi rehabilitation centre in Mogadishu, whom my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict met during her visit in August. The children have been deprived of their liberty, as they are not free to leave the centre. The Government must ensure that any child deprived of his or her liberty for alleged association with armed groups is treated primarily as a victim and handed over to child protection actors.

149. Some 340 incidents of killing and maiming were documented affecting 520 children (393 boys, 127 girls) perpetrated by the national army and allied militia (193), Al-Shabaab (96), and other armed elements (231). Children have been killed in crossfire, sometimes during joint national army/AMISOM operations and in suicide attacks. Targeted attacks against the national army, AMISOM and prominent Federal Government of Somalia officials also led to large numbers of civilian casualties, including children. Al-Shabaab carried out public executions, including of children, as punitive measures and to instil fear. One boy and one girl were executed on suspicion of being spies for the Federal Government or AMISOM. Seventeen children were reported killed and maimed during military operations by AMISOM.

150. The monitoring and reporting of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children remained a challenge, among other things, because of the victims' fear of stigmatization. A total of 70 incidents affecting 76 girls were reportedly committed by the national army and allied militia (24), Al-Shabaab (19) and other armed groups (33). Girls in internally displaced persons camps were particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and forced marriage. At least 13 documented incidents of abduction resulted in rape and forced marriage. In one particularly tragic incident

in April, a 14-year-old female internally displaced person was abducted, raped and then killed by unknown armed men.

151. Seventeen schools were subjected to attacks by Al-Shabaab (eight), the national army and allied militia (six), and unknown armed elements (three). One school was also severely damaged in shelling by AMISOM. Al-Shabaab continued to use schools for recruitment and disrupted learning for hundreds of children including by distributing jihadist booklets for teachers and conducting indoctrination lectures. Incidents targeting protected personnel were also documented such as the detention of two teachers by Al-Shabaab for declining to refer their students to religious classes. Four schools were used for military purposes by the national army (three), later vacated, and Al-Shabaab (one). It was also reported that AMISOM used a school for military purposes during a few days in December.

152. Four hospitals were attacked by unknown armed groups (3) and Al-Shabaab (1) and incidents affecting related-personnel were documented. In one incident, Al-Shabaab abducted a health worker to provide medical care to its wounded fighters. Other incidents included improvised explosive device attacks against two hospitals resulting in the deaths of two doctors and two boys.

153. A total of 133 children were abducted, by Al-Shabaab (97), the national army and allied militia (25), and unknown armed groups (11). More than half of the children abducted by Al-Shabaab were used to increase its numbers ahead of joint national army/AMISOM operations.

154. Fifteen incidents of denial of humanitarian access were reported, the majority by unknown armed groups, and 3 each by Al-Shabaab and the national army.

155. My Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict visited Somalia in August to assess the situation of children affected by conflict, engage with the Federal Government of Somalia on the implementation of the two action plans signed in 2012 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and advocate for the strengthening of the legal framework for the protection of children.

156. Coordination mechanisms between the United Nations, the Federal Government of Somalia, AMISOM and other partners were established to facilitate the implementation of the action plans. Significant steps were also taken with the signature of standard operating procedures for the handover of children separated from armed groups in February and the establishment of a child protection unit at the national army headquarters. Moreover, a mobile national army/United Nations team screened over 1,000 soldiers and the Barre Aden Shire "Hirale" militia that surrendered in anticipation of integration into the national army. No children were found during the screening exercises. The United Nations provided training on child protection to more than 8,000 national army soldiers, in collaboration with the European Union Training Mission in Somalia and AMISOM. In addition, following United Nations advocacy, the AMISOM Force Commander issued a directive to reinforce accountability and compliance with children's rights during operations.

157. Following the listing of Ahl Al-Sunna wal-Jama'a for the recruitment and use of children, the United Nations initiated dialogue with the group and discussed steps towards the formulation of a commitment to halt and prevent continuation of the practice.

158. The United Nations also supported the reintegration of 500 children (375 boys, 125 girls) through community-based programmes. Reintegration activities included provision of psychosocial assistance, "back-to-school" support programmes and vocational training.

159. In December, in a positive legislative development, the Federal Parliament adopted a law ratifying the Convention of the Rights of the Child. The law was signed by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud on 20 January 2015. I welcome the progress made by the Federal Government of Somalia and I encourage it to sustain all its efforts to better protect children in Somalia, including by finalizing the ratification process of the Convention and to take steps to ratify its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

South Sudan

160. The political landscape in South Sudan changed dramatically in the wake of heavy fighting that broke out in Juba on 15 December 2013. Although the onset of the conflict was sparked by political issues, an ethnic dimension quickly evolved and had devastating effects for children. There was a large increase in the number of violations in 2014, with a total of 514 verified incidents affecting 16,307 children. A detailed account of the effects of the armed conflict on children in South Sudan is available in my recent report to the Security Council, covering the period from 1 March 2011 to 30 September 2014 (S/2014/884).

161. Eighty-one incidents of recruitment and use of children were verified, affecting 617 children (612 boys, 5 girls). The majority were associated with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) (310) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO) (108), but also with the South Sudan National Police Service, the South Sudan Wildlife Service, the South Sudan Liberation Army (SSLA), the South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army-Cobra Faction (SSDM/A-CF), the White Army and armed groups allied to Gabriel Tanginye. Unverified large numbers of children have also been observed with the Johnson Olonyi armed group, whose troop integration into SPLA was pending completion as at April 2015, and with other unidentified armed actors. Children were at risk of recruitment in refugee and internally displaced persons camps, protection of civilian sites and in their own communities. Given the challenging security situation and safety concerns for children, it has not always been possible to verify information. Last, as reported in the section of the present on the Sudan, in January and February, 64 boys, aged 14 to 17 years, were reportedly recruited by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in Unity State, South Sudan. Fifty-five of those cases were verified.

162. Ninety children were verified killed and 220 injured. There was also a disturbing increase in the incidents of killing and maiming of children reported to the United Nations that could not be verified. One report identified up to 490 bodies of children in mass graves found around Bor following heavy fighting at the start of the conflict. Some of the reported incidents suggest that children were summarily executed. For instance, following the fighting in Rubkona and Bentiu towns in April, two boys were found dead with their hands tied behind their back outside a mosque that was used by civilians seeking protection. The affiliation of the perpetrators is unknown but the incident occurred during an exchange of fire between SPLA and SPLA-IO.

163. In another incident, the United Nations received testimonies from boys aged 14 to 17 years in Juba who had been detained by security forces and subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment, such as beatings and being urinated upon, during interrogations about ethnic affiliation and involvement in the conflict.

164. Rape and other forms of sexual violence were reported, with a total of 22 incidents verified affecting 36 children (4 boys and 32 girls) by SPLA (24), JEM (4), SPLA-IO (1) and unknown perpetrators (7). In April, when SPLA-IO took control of Bentiu, hate speech calling upon persons to kill and commit sexual violence against non-Nuers and foreigners was broadcast on local radio.

165. There were seven incidents of attacks on schools, including looting, and 60 involving military use. Thirty-four schools in use, some before the reporting period, were vacated following United Nations advocacy; as at December, 33 reportedly remained in use by numerous armed actors, affecting access to education for approximately 11,000 children. A total of 22 incidents of attacks on medical clinics and health centres were also verified. In one incident in April, Bentiu Hospital was attacked by SPLA-IO, and medical staff, patients and civilians seeking protection inside the hospital, were killed.

166. Thirty-four incidents of abduction were verified affecting 147 children (52 boys, 95 girls). The United Nations received worrisome reports of large-scale abductions, including up to 105 children (29 boys, 76 girls) by SPLA-IO in Malakal in February. As at April 2015, abductions continued in large numbers.

167. One hundred and ninety-nine incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified, representing a large increase from 2013. Incidents included forceful entry into compounds, looting, seizure of assets and harassment of humanitarian workers.

168. No incidents of LRA attacks involving children were reported in South Sudan. However, a total of 43 children either escaped or were rescued from the group. Twenty-eight of them have since been reunified with their families, while the rest remain in the interim care centre in Yambio, Western Equatoria State, pending family tracing and reunification.

169. Family tracing and reunification remained a challenge, owing partly to limited access or no access for child protection actors to some areas. Rapid response missions were occasionally conducted to provide basic, life-saving assistance to children in hard-to-reach areas. During a meeting with my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the leader of the South Sudan Democratic Army — Cobra Faction (SSDM/A-CF), David Yau Yau, acknowledged that he had recruited children and declared himself ready to release them. As at April 2015, over 750 children had been released to the United Nations and were receiving interim care, psychosocial support and education service.

170. My Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict visited South Sudan in June to assess the impact of the conflict on children and engage with national authorities. During her visit, the President committed to issuing a decree criminalizing the recruitment and use of children and to issuing command orders to stop the military use of schools. My Special Representative also witnessed the signature of the recommitment by the Minister of Defence and Veteran Affairs to the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children. The recommitment also included stopping and preventing sexual violence, the killing and maiming of children and attacks on schools and hospitals. In August, a

workplan to implement the agreement was endorsed. In October, the Government and the United Nations launched the campaign entitled "Children, Not Soldiers" at the national level. Following extensive advocacy, the Government and the United Nations also established a joint high-level committee on children affected by armed conflict. In May, the leader of SPLA-IO also signed a commitment agreement with my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to end violations against children.

171. As at the end of 2014, neither the Government nor SPLA-IO had made any progress in implementing their commitments. On the contrary, reports of violations, particularly recruitment and use and abduction of children, continue unabated. I call upon all parties to the conflict in South Sudan to stop all violations against children and to take all necessary measures, including through prompt and thorough investigations and prosecution, to hold perpetrators to account. I urge the Government of South Sudan to take concrete measures and fully implement the action plan and the recommitment agreement signed in June. I also urge SPLA-IO to implement the commitment that its Chair signed with my Special Representative in May.

Sudan

Three areas

172. Conflict continued in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, where large areas remained inaccessible, especially those under the control of armed groups. After several months of political deadlock, fighting intensified during the first quarter of 2014. The Government of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) resumed talks in November in Addis Ababa under the auspices of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel, but negotiations were suspended indefinitely by early December.

173. In April and December, the Government launched two phases of its "Decisive Summer" campaign to regain control of areas controlled by SPLM-N. This resulted in new waves of mass displacement. Tribal fighting was also observed, particularly in West Kordofan, with one verified incident in November of clashes breaking out among members of two Misseryia sub-clans in which at least 40 children were reportedly killed or injured. The disputed area of Abyei also witnessed continuing tensions.

174. The United Nations verified the recruitment of 60 boys aged 14 to 17 years by the JEM (55) and SPLM-N (5). All but 3 of them occurred during a forced recruitment campaign in refugee settlements in Unity State in South Sudan. Unverified information was received about an additional 9 boys recruited by JEM in that same period. Although no new recruitment cases by Sudanese Armed Forces were verified, the United Nations received credible information of recruitment and use of children by the Popular Defence Forces. Large areas of those states were inaccessible, which limited United Nations ability to monitor allegations in order to reflect the full extent of violations.

175. At least 12 incidents (2 verified) were reported, in which 62 children, aged 5 to 17 years, were killed or maimed. A boy was killed in the SPLM-N shelling of Kadugli in May and another boy died in an explosive remnants of war incident. Twenty-eight children (9 girls, 19 boys) were reportedly killed and 32 injured

(7 girls, 25 boys) in the shelling by the armed forces of SPLM-N-controlled areas. A further 42 children were reportedly killed or maimed as a result of tribal clashes.

176. Four boys, all South Sudanese refugees, were abducted by Arab men in El Muglad locality, West Kordofan, and kept in captivity for approximately six months. They were released and reunified with their families in August following negotiations by the Sudan Police Family and Child Protection Unit.

177. One school and two hospitals run by NGOs were severely damaged in aerial bombardments by the armed forces on SPLM-N-held territories, affecting access to education and medical care for over 75,000 children. In one instance, six persons were injured and the hospital's emergency room and pharmacy were destroyed. The United Nations also received credible information regarding the military use of three schools by the armed forces in South Kordofan.

178. Access to Government and SPLM-N-controlled areas remained very challenging, even though there was a slight improvement compared with 2013. For the first time, the United Nations was granted limited access to Kurmuk and Bau localities in Blue Nile. Access to Abyei through Kadugli continued to be difficult.

Darfur

179. Darfur continued to experience intermittent fighting between Government forces and non-signatory armed groups, with a spike from January to May and in December, following the launch of the Government's "Decisive Summer" military offensive using the rapid support forces. Intertribal and intratribal clashes in which children were involved intensified. In that context, the verification of violations against children remained difficult.

180. The country task force on monitoring and reporting verified three boys recruited and used by the armed forces and three by unidentified militias, a marked decrease compared with 2013. However, allegations of the recruitment of children continued to be received. In March, eyewitnesses reported the presence of boys between 15 and 17 years of age during a rapid support forces parade in Nyala, South Darfur. Another report mentioned that an estimated 37 children were seen carrying machine guns in El Daein, East Darfur.

181. Moreover, 197 children (135 boys, 62 girls) were killed (65) and maimed (132), by cross-fire during fighting between government forces and armed groups and in aerial bombardments by the armed forces. In addition, 15 children were killed and 29 injured by explosive remnants of war.

182. Forty-eight incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence affecting 60 girls were verified and attributed to the armed forces (15), the rapid support forces (10) and unidentified armed men (35). In most cases, girls were raped during attacks on their villages or when performing daily activities. Verifying cases of sexual violence remains a challenge due to fear of reprisals, mistrust in law enforcement and judicial authorities, and social stigma. In addition, the requirement by law to prove rape as a crime before the provision of medical care deters survivors and families from seeking help. When they do so, criminal law provisions may be interpreted in such a way that the survivor is accused of adultery. In cases where perpetrators are identified, families of victims often settle cases outside judicial proceedings.

183. Furthermore, the United Nations received allegations of the rape of 200 women, including children, by the armed forces in Thabit, North Darfur, in October. On 9 November, UNAMID conducted a mission to investigate the allegations, which could not be verified, as security personnel were present during UNAMID interactions with the community. UNAMID has since continued to face restrictions in its effort to access Thabit.

184. Ten schools were severely damaged, destroyed or looted during fighting between Government security forces and armed groups and in aerial bombardments by the armed forces. Eight incidents of attacks, looting and destruction of hospitals were reported. One school used militarily by the armed forces in South Darfur was also verified.

185. Eight incidents of abduction of 13 children (10 boys, 3) were reported and attributed to the rapid support forces (4), border guards (3), armed forces (1) and unidentified militias (5). Children were used in support functions or labour and sometimes were sexually abused.

186. Denial of humanitarian access and the imposition of restrictions on movements continued to impede efforts to reach affected communities, including children.

187. On 6 August, the Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi established an operational mechanism to end recruitment and use of children, following a command order issued in December 2013. UNAMID engaged in dialogue with tribal leaders and communities, which resulted in the adoption of a community-based strategic plan to end use of children in intercommunal violence in October. It followed the issuance of a command order by the leader of the Mahameed clan of the Northern Rezeigat. On 26 November, UNAMID, UNICEF and the Sudan commission on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration launched the Darfur-wide campaign entitled "No Child Soldiers — Protect Darfur" in Masseriah, North Darfur. Training and awareness-raising activities on child protection were also conducted with civil society, religious and tribal leaders, state-level government personnel and the armed forces.

188. Limited progress was observed in holding the perpetrators of violations against children accountable. Twelve cases of arrest were documented by the country task force on monitoring and reporting, of which 4 resulted in prosecution and 1 in a sentence of 20 years' imprisonment for rape.

189. I urge the Government of the Sudan to finalize and sign the action plan to address recruitment and use of children by its security forces.

Syrian Arab Republic

190. Conflict continued at unprecedented levels across the Syrian Arab Republic, resulting in massive violations against children. The United Nations verified 2,107 grave violations by all parties to the conflict in major urban and rural areas. ISIL has taken over large parts of the country and used public brutality and indoctrination to ensure the submission of communities; children were specifically targeted. The United Nations had limited capacity to verify information in the areas under the control of ISIL. Sieges and bombardments of civilian areas continued, particularly by Syrian Government Forces, which also hampered the verification of incidents.

191. The recruitment and use of children in combat has become commonplace in the Syrian Arab Republic. While actual numbers are expected to be higher, the United Nations verified that 271 boys and 7 girls had been recruited and used by groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) (142), Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/YPJ) (24), ISIL (69) and al-Nusra Front (ANF) (25). In 77 per cent of the cases, children were armed or used in combat and almost one fifth were under 15 years of age. Boys associated with armed groups were commonly between 14 and 17 years of age, with 17 verified cases under the age of 15. In many cases, children were paid to fight for salaries of up to $400 per month. The payment of relatively large salaries by ANF, FSA, and in particular ISIL, created an incentive for children and their parents under difficult economic circumstances.

192. Fragmentation of FSA resulted in localized and variable recruitment, training and salary practices. During armed battles, children were used for fighting, attending to the wounded or for recording events for propaganda purposes.

193. YPG/YPJ continued to recruit and use boys and girls, including children younger than 15 years, reportedly taking them to indoctrination and training camps. For example, in March, a 13-year-old girl was taken to Ras al-Ayn for military training and the requests by her parents to see her were refused. In most cases, children were used in combat roles, and repeated allegations of "conscription" policies targeting children were levelled against YPG/YPJ.

194. Reports of the recruitment and use of boys by ISIL and ANF increased significantly. In 25 per cent of verified cases, boys were under the age of 15, including some as young as 8 years of age. ISIL reportedly established at least three child training camps in Raqqa, and hundreds of boys as young as 10 years of age were imprisoned in Aleppo, forced to attend indoctrination seminars and promised salaries, mobile phones, weapons, a martyr's place in paradise and the "gift" of a wife upon joining ISIL. In training and using children for combat roles, ISIL has violated international humanitarian law and perpetrated war crimes on a mass scale. Children were also recruited as suicide bombers and used to perpetrate extreme violence. For example, in July, four boys fighting with ANF in Dar'a participated in the beheading of four Syrian Government Forces soldiers.

195. A number of pro-Government groups, including Hizbullah, also reportedly recruited children in small numbers. Five boys joined the Popular Committee to support Syrian Government forces in al-Midan, Damascus. Children were also used as human shields and for forced labour. In November, children were among the civilians reportedly forced at gunpoint to be in front of the Syrian Government forces tanks entering the town of al-Sheikh Meskin to secure the Dar'a-Damascus highway.

196. Detention of children by Syrian authorities continued, with 38 verified cases (31 boys, 7 girls), including 15 who were subjected to torture. Children were arrested at checkpoints and schools. For example, in a verified incident in July, a 14-year-old boy from Homs, who had been detained in the State Security Centre, confessed under torture to carrying weapons and attacking checkpoints.

197. Indiscriminate attacks launched in civilian populated areas continued to cause widespread killing and maiming. The United Nations verified the killing of 368 children (184 boys, 66 girls, 118 gender unknown) by Syrian Government forces (221), ISIL/ANF (44), FSA-affiliated groups (24), international coalition

airstrikes (4) and unknown parties (75). There were 771 cases of children maimed (420 boys, 142 girls, 209 gender unknown) by Syrian Government forces and pro-Government groups (336), FSA-affiliated groups (296), ISIL and ANF (19), YPG/YPJ (1) and unknown parties (119) across the country. Actual numbers are believed to be much higher.

198. Armed groups killed and maimed children by firing mortars mainly in Government-controlled areas. For example, a 7-year-old boy and a teacher were killed and 56 children injured in a mortar attack on the Al-Manar Armenian Catholic School in Damascus in April. Vehicle-borne improvised explosive device and suicide attacks by armed groups accounted for almost one fifth of child casualties. In April, 69 children were killed and injured in a double vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attack in a Government-controlled neighbourhood of Homs.

199. The public brutality and extreme violence perpetrated by ISIL also targeted children. For example, in July, a 15-year-old boy accused of adultery was publicly executed in Manbij, with his parents forced to watch and his corpse left on display for three days. In November, civilians were forced to participate in the stoning of a 14-year-old girl in Dei-ez-Zor. ISIL reportedly encouraged children to participate in public brutality, including holding decapitated heads for public display or playing "football" with them.

200. Aerial bombardment of civilian areas accounted for over 90 per cent of children documented killed and maimed by Syrian Government forces. In an attack in April by Syrian Government forces on the Ein Jalout primary school in Aleppo, 33 children were killed and 40 injured. Barrel bombs accounted for almost one third of child casualties inflicted by Syrian Government forces, including 6 children killed in June in al-Shajara internally displaced persons camp, Dar'a. Children continued to be killed during ground operations by pro-Government groups. For instance, in July, three children, aged 10 to 14 years, fleeing Suweida were killed by Popular Committee fighters. Children also continued to fall victim to explosive remnants of war.

201. The United Nations received 18 reports of sexual violence against children by ISIL (9), Syrian Government forces (5), Popular Committees (2), FSA (1) and the Kurdish police (1), of which 11 were verified. Forced marriage of girls to foreign fighters became common in ISIL-controlled territory. In July, the father of a 14-year-old girl in Aleppo was tortured for three days until he agreed to have his daughter marry an Egyptian ISIL "Emir". ISIL issued guidance on the treatment of sex slaves, including children, and Yazidi girls abducted in Iraq were moved to and sold in Raqqa. Allegations of sexual violence against children by Syrian Government forces and pro-Government groups continued, with doctors reporting treating raped girls requesting abortions. In January, a 13-year-old boy was "arrested" at a checkpoint by the Popular Committee in Suweida and repeatedly raped over the course of three days.

202. According to the Ministry of Education, 889 schools had been fully (379) or partially (510) damaged by end-2014. The United Nations verified 60 attacks on education facilities by Syrian Government forces (39), ISIL (9), FSA (1), and unidentified parties (11). For example, in October two explosions near the Al Makhzomi and Al Mouhdetheh primary schools in Akrama, Homs City, killed 29 children and maimed 27. Families repeatedly reported being too scared to send their children to school. The military use of schools also continued, with nine

verified cases: YPG/YPJ (4), FSA (3) and ISIL (2). ISIL appropriated schools for child indoctrination, and in late 2014 all schools in ISIL-controlled Aleppo, Dei-ez-Zor and Raqqa were closed pending adoption of a "modified" curriculum.

203. By December, 413 medical facilities tracked by the United Nations were partially or fully damaged, while 823 were only partially functioning or not functioning due to shortage of staffing, equipment or use for other purposes. Eighty-six attacks on health facilities and 178 medical personnel killed were reported. The United Nations verified 28 attacks on health facilities and personnel by: Syrian Government forces (17), ISIL (9) and unidentified parties (2). For example, in May, a rocket attack on an FSA field hospital in an abandoned school in Jasem, Dar'a resulted in the death of two children and four medical personnel.

204. Abductions became a prominent tool used by ISIL. The United Nations verified that ISIL abducted and/or imprisoned 463 children, including for use in prisoner exchanges and for recruitment purposes, a number of whom were tortured. In May, 153 Kurdish boys aged 13 to 17 years were abducted in Manbij, Aleppo, while returning home from their school exams. Armed groups also arbitrarily detained children for alleged "criminal" offenses.

205. By January 2015, 212,000 persons remained under siege, 163,500 of them by Syrian Government forces and 26,500 by armed groups, and subjected to starvation. Children attempting to escape besieged areas were killed by snipers or in minefields. In January, an 11-year-old boy was killed by a sniper while attempting to leave al-Nashabiya, Rural Damascus. Attacks by armed groups on civilian infrastructure left millions of persons, including children, without access to water and electricity. Administrative blockages and refusals to allow certain items on inter-agency convoys, including surgical supplies, were common and threats and attacks on humanitarian personnel and facilities continued.

206. There were several meetings between the United Nations and the Government's Interministerial Committee on Child Protection, and an expert level group of government and United Nations officials was established to strengthen engagement. In May, the United Nations provided training materials to support the Commission for Family Affairs in conducting child rights orientation for Syrian Government forces; however, this has yet to be implemented. Legislative Decree 22, adopted in June, granted an amnesty for children associated with armed groups, and the Government committed to diverting those children to rehabilitation programmes. However, cases of children detained by Syrian Government forces were verified by the United Nations throughout the year. In all circumstances, children are entitled to benefit from the special status of juveniles in conflict with the law, in conformity with international humanitarian and human rights law.

207. The political and military leadership of both YPG/YPJ and the FSA Supreme Military Council publicly committed to ending child recruitment and use, enforcing disciplinary measures and issuing command orders to that effect. However, the recruitment and use of children by both groups following these commitments continued and was verified by the United Nations.

Yemen

208. During the reporting period, the security situation deteriorated significantly in the northern governorates where Al Houthi/Ansar Allah (hereinafter Ansar Allah)

expanded its presence. Armed clashes took place between the Yemeni Armed Forces and Islah-backed pro-Government tribal militias and tribal armed groups, against Ansar Allah and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The situation in the southern governorates also remained tense and armed clashes took place in Al Dhale'e. A mass offensive was conducted by YAF against AQAP and Ansar Al Sharia', and clashes continued in Aden between Al Hirak (a southern cessation movement) supporters and the security forces. As at April 2015, an international coalition had launched airstrikes against Ansar Allah, which reportedly resulted in a significant number of child casualties.

209. The United Nations verified a significant increase from 2013 of recruitment and use of children, with a total of 156 boys recruited and used between the ages of 9 and 17. The majority (140) of cases were perpetrated by Ansar Allah with a highly visible presence. The United Nations observed and documented armed children manning checkpoints, being present on armed vehicles and guarding buildings. Following Ansar Allah's expansion into the capital in September, distinguishing between members of YAF and Ansar Allah became increasingly challenging, particularly at checkpoints. Eleven boys between the ages of 16 and 17 were recruited and used by Islah-backed tribal militias aligned with the Government or Salafists, all except two of them in the frontlines. An additional four boys were verified as joining tribal armed groups in Al Bayda governorate.

210. The numbers of child casualties increased significantly from the previous reporting period, with 74 children (56 boys, 18 girls) killed and 244 (176 boys, 68 girls) maimed. Child casualties due to mines and other explosive devices more than doubled, with 10 children killed and 54 maimed. Ansar Allah was targeted and attacked, including by two suicide bombings that killed 14 and injured 25 boys. A total of 14 children were killed and 30 maimed by six improvised explosive devices, including an attack on an Ansar Allah checkpoint. Another 10 children were killed and 37 injured due to shelling, and 2 boys and 3 girls were maimed as a result of aerial bombings, including one drone strike on 29 September in Al Jawf, which maimed 1 boy and 2 girls.

211. Nine boys were detained by Ansar Allah as they reportedly conducted "law enforcement operations". Six other incidents of detention by Ansar Allah were also verified involving six boys. four of whom were detained for their alleged association with Islah, and one because of his father's association with Islah.

212. The United Nations verified 35 attacks against schools. For example, all 10 schools attacked in Amanah Al Asimah governorate were destroyed during clashes that took place in September between Ansar Allah and YAF and pro-Government tribal militias. Nine attacks were attributed to YAF and eight to Ansar Allah. In many cases schools were forced to close completely.

213. The United Nations verified 13 attacks against hospitals by Ansar Allah and YAF, which severely hampered the provision of medical services. For example, on 21 January, a hospital in Al Dhale'e district was shelled by YAF, resulting in the death of a 45-day-old boy and injury to his 2-year-old sister while they were trying to escape the shelling with their father.

214. Ninety-two schools were verified as being used for military purposes by armed forces and groups with the majority of schools being used by Ansar Allah for providing accommodation or as weapons' storage. In response to that trend, the

Ministry of Education and Governorate Education Offices, supported by the United Nations, established task forces on education in emergency, which vacated at least 25 schools used by Ansar Allah.

215. In total, 43 denials of humanitarian access were verified. In a positive development, a United Nations staff member kidnapped by an unknown armed group was released in November after 13 months in captivity.

216. On 14 May, in a ceremony attended by my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the Government of Yemen signed an action plan with the United Nations to end and further prevent the recruitment and use of children by YAF. Within a month after the signing ceremony, follow-up mechanisms were established in accordance with the action plan. In a welcome development, following engagement by the United Nations with the Constitutional Drafting Committee, the draft constitution issued in January 2015 includes the prohibition of voluntary recruitment of all persons under the age of 18. The final version of a draft action plan to end the recruitment and use of children by Ansar Allah was endorsed by their Human Rights and Civil Society Office, which was reportedly shared with the office of Abdul Malik Badrealdeen Al Houthi. Since the eruption of violence in early 2015 all progress on actions plans and on ending violations has been put on hold.

B. Situations not on the agenda of the Security Council or other situations

Colombia

217. In 2014, peace talks between the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejercito del Pueblo (FARC-EP) continued in Havana. The conclusions on the three first items of the agenda, "Rural development", "Political participation" and "Illicit drugs", were shared publicly and discussions began on item five, "Victims". The latter opened up the opportunity to raise specific concerns on child protection, in particular with regard to the recognition of the rights of child victims. At the request of the negotiating parties, the United Nations and the National University of Colombia organized regional and national forums to collect the views of victims and proposals. On those occasions, many national and international actors advocated for child protection concerns to be raised at the negotiating table. In December, the FARC-EP and the Government started talks about de-escalating the conflict, including issues related to child recruitment and a ceasefire. I commend the sustained efforts to put an end to the conflict and encourage all parties to take further concrete steps to protect children and guarantee lasting improvements for children's rights, including under item three, "End of conflict".

218. Despite the ongoing peace process, hostilities between FARC-EP, the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and the Colombian Armed Forces continued and intensified in some parts of the country, causing displacement and often putting children at risk of recruitment and sexual violence. As at December 2014, there were some six million persons registered as internally displaced persons, approximately 35 per cent of whom were children. Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities were particularly affected. Violence committed by post-demobilization groups and other local armed groups was an important trigger of displacement, both

in urban and rural areas. In addition, about 500,000 persons suffered from severe mobility restrictions to access basic services and assistance, as a result of the sharp increase in attacks against civilian infrastructure committed throughout 2014, mostly by ELN (52 per cent) and FARC-EP (22 per cent).

219. The United Nations verified 343 cases of recruitment and use of children by armed groups in 22 departments and in Bogotá. The Colombian Family Welfare Institute documented the separation of 277 children, the majority of whom had escaped from armed groups. A total of 198 children had been recruited by FARC-EP, 52 by ELN, and the remaining by post-demobilization groups and other armed groups. In addition, the Ombudsman Office issued at least 36 risk reports on recruitment in 20 departments.

220. On 12 February 2015, FARC-EP announced that it had raised the recruitment age to 17 years. While I take note of that positive development, I wish to recall that the Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by Colombia in 1991 stipulates that a child means every human being below the age of 18, and that its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, ratified in 2005, prohibits armed groups from recruiting children under the age of 18 and provides that the State party should prevent such recruitment and use.

221. At least nine children were killed and 60 were maimed, mostly in landmine incidents. Children, predominantly girls, were also victims of sexual violence attributed to armed groups, including post-demobilization groups, and in some cases to members of national armed forces. Furthermore, sexual exploitation and abuse of girls by members of armed groups in mining zones continued. The United Nations received reports of the detention in Bolivar of three persons charged with selling girls for sexual purposes to armed groups and to mine workers.

222. There were 12 reported cases of schools damaged in crossfire, anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war, as well as 11 cases of military use by parties to the conflict. In May, the armed forces found 76 gas cylinders stored by FARC-EP in a school in Cauca, ready to be used in combat, thereby putting schoolchildren at risk. In addition, the presence of units of the armed forces near or in front of schools during class hours put school premises and children at risk. Within the reporting period, teachers were also subject to threats by FARC-EP, ELN, Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia/Los Urabeños and Los Rastrojos and three teachers were killed by unidentified armed groups.

223. Despite its prohibition by the National Child Protection Code (Art. 41, para. 29, of Law 1098 of 2006), the involvement of children in civic-military activities organized by the armed forces continued in several parts of the country. For example, in July, in Cauca, the armed forces carried out a civic-military activity, inviting more than 500 persons; the recreational activity for children was carried out by the armed forces psychological operations team. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has previously shared its concerns with regard to civic-military activities organized by the armed forces inside schools and in the community. In its recent report on prevention of the recruitment of children and adolescents, issued in December 2014, the Ombudsman Office also requested the Ministry of Defence, the armed forces and the police to refrain from carrying out the campaigns with children. I echo those concerns and call upon the armed forces to refrain from involving children in any military activities that may place them at risk of being targeted by armed groups.

224. Since 1999, at least 5,694 children have been separated from armed groups and benefitted from the Colombian Family Welfare Institute programme. With regard to protection and assistance provided to children separated from armed groups as stipulated in the National Child Protection Code and the Victims Law, all children, as victims, should be accorded equal protection, regardless of the group that recruited or used them. In some cases, however, children who had been separated from armed groups, mostly those associated with post-demobilization groups, were referred to the Office of the Attorney General for prosecution without benefitting from the Institute's programmes for protection and assistance.

225. Since 1999, there have been 193 convictions for child recruitment, including under the Justice and Peace Law of 2005 and by the Human Rights Unit of the Office of the Attorney General, as well as by regional and local courts. In June, a new bill for the protection of victims of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict was approved. I welcome that major step, which was taken to harmonize the national legislation with international standards.

India

226. The recruitment and use of children as young as six years of age by armed groups, including the Naxalites, continued. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Naxalites in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha States recruited boys and girls between 6 and 12 years of age into specific children's units. They were used as informers and taught to fight with crude weapons, such as sticks. At the age of 12, children associated with Naxalites are reportedly transferred to specific units, where they receive training in weapon handling and the use of improvised explosive devices.

227. In Naxalite recruitment campaigns targeting poor communities, parents are forced to offer children under the threat of violence. Similarly, children are reportedly threatened with the killing of family members should they escape or surrender to security forces. In August, in Lakhisarai district, Naxalites reportedly made demands of children from families, resulting in up to 100 girls and boys, between 10 and 15 years of age, joining the group. In West Singhbhum, government security forces reportedly arrested an armed group element for the recruitment of 11 children aged 9 to 13 years, including 5 girls, on their way to a training camp. The recruiter allegedly stated that his commander had specifically asked for girls. According to the Government, based on the statements of several women formerly associated with Naxalite groups, sexual violence is common in the camps. Violence and the use of schools as recruitment grounds affected access to education for children in Naxalite areas.

228. The United Nations also received reports of the recruitment and use of children in Assam and Manipur States. Children were reportedly lured into joining armed groups in the face of the lack of livelihood alternatives, but were also abducted and forcibly recruited, including through coercion of family members and the threat of violence. Concerns persist over allegations of detention of children in violence-affected states, including for alleged association with armed groups.

229. I am concerned by the Government reports of the use of children as human shields and in combat roles by the Naxalites. The period under review reportedly saw an increase in Naxalite violence, resulting in the killing of 89 civilians and 48 security personnel in 429 incidents in the first quarter alone. Concerns also

persisted over the killing and maiming of children in north-eastern states. For example, in Assam, on 23 December, in four seemingly coordinated attacks, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland allegedly killed around 75 civilians, including at least 18 children.

Nigeria

230. Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), commonly known as Boko Haram, continued and intensified its attacks on the civilian population in the three north-eastern states of Nigeria (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe). High-profile attacks were also conducted in other parts of the country: Kano, Gombe and Bauchi States, and the Federal Capital Territory. The group's tactics began with hit-and-run attacks targeting government officials, security forces, detention centres, religious figures and, increasingly, schools and children, and have evolved into take-and-hold attacks, controlling large swaths of territory. The pace and intensity of attacks resulted in the displacement of over 1 million persons, the majority being women and children. Since June, Nigerian security forces increased their operations against Boko Haram, in conjunction with the Civilian Joint Task Force and other pro-Government vigilante groups. Boko Haram activities have progressively expanded beyond Nigeria's borders into Cameroon, Chad and the Niger and have prompted a regional response to address the threat posed by the group.

231. In December, the United Nations in Nigeria formally established a country task force on children affected by armed conflict to monitor and report on violations against children following the listing of Boko Haram in my previous annual report (A/68/878-S/2014/339). The verification of incidents remained challenging, due to a severe lack of access to affected areas.

232. Increased reports were received on the recruitment and use of boys and girls by Boko Haram in support roles and in combat. Children were also used as human shields to protect Boko Haram elements. Another alarming trend observed since July was the growing number of girls used as suicide bombers in populated urban centres. For example, in July, four teenage girls were reported to have carried out a series of suicide attacks attributed to Boko Haram in Kano. A 13-year-old girl from Adamawa State was reportedly rescued at a checkpoint in Katsina State while carrying a belt with explosives. The United Nations also received reports of children joining CJTF and other vigilante groups, voluntarily or forcibly, and being used to man checkpoints, gather intelligence and participate in armed patrols. It was reported that some of the civilians, including children, who had voluntarily joined a particular side sometimes had done so in order to avoid the suspicion that they were associated with, or sympathetic to, the other side.

233. The killing of civilians, including children, by Boko Haram continued and sharply increased during the period under review. It is estimated that at least 7,380 persons were killed in 255 incidents (5,083 in Borno, 893 in Adamawa, 517 in Yobe and 887 in other states). Data on the age and status of the victims is not available and therefore, the exact number of children killed and injured remains unknown. Children were killed and maimed during Boko Haram raids on villages, in targeted attacks in public places, in clashes between Boko Haram and the Nigerian security forces and as a result of suicide bombings. Children were also killed by Boko Haram in their schools. Education authorities in the north-east recorded the killing of 314 school children between January 2012 and December

2014. In February, 59 secondary schoolboys were shot or burned to death in their dormitory during a night-time attack in Buni Yadi, Yobe. In November, a suicide bomber disguised in a school uniform killed at least 47 school children and injured 117 others in Potiskum, Yobe. In addition, 26 incidents of suicide attacks were reported, in the states of Borno (nine), Kano (eight), Yobe (five), Gombe (two), Bauchi (one), and in the Federal Capital Territory (one). The suicide attacks reportedly involved 45 suicide bombers and claimed the lives of at least 688 persons, including over 200 persons at the Grand Mosque in Kano.

234. Worrisome allegations were received of other violations against civilians, including children, by Government armed forces, CJTF and vigilante groups, including extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detention and torture.

235. Boko Haram targeted schools and teachers perceived to provide a "Western" curriculum. School facilities were attacked, looted and destroyed, teachers and students were killed, threatened and abducted. According to education authorities, a total of 338 schools were destroyed and damaged, and at least 196 teachers killed between 2012 and 2014. A number of specific incidents where children were targeted and killed are outlined in paragraph 230 above. Continuing threats in all three north-eastern states led to reduced access to education, closure of schools, teachers leaving and the withdrawal of children from schools. The United Nations received reports of health centres also looted and destroyed. Access for polio health workers was increasingly reduced, due to growing insecurity.

236. Since 2009, Boko Haram has reportedly been responsible for the abduction of at least 500 young women and girls from their homes or schools and while travelling on roads in the affected States. The abduction of 276 girls from their school in Chibok, Borno, in April 2014, represented the largest single incident of abduction attributed to the group. Of the 276 abductees, 57 managed to escape. Incidents continued to be reported and, in September, over 100 young women and girls were abducted from villages during attacks in Adamawa State. The whereabouts of the Chibok girls and the other abductees remain unknown. According to accounts from escapees, they were subjected to forcible religious conversion, physical and psychological abuse, forced labour and forced marriage to Boko Haram fighters. The group's stated motives for abductions include retaliation against the Government for detention of relatives and punishment of schoolchildren for attending Western-style schools.

237. My Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict visited Nigeria in January 2015 to assess the impact of the conflict on children, support the roll-out of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and engage with the Government, including sharing her concerns regarding the allegations on violations committed by government forces, CJTF and vigilante groups. During the visit, the Special Representative met with civilian and military authorities at the highest level, who expressed readiness to cooperate with the monitoring and reporting mechanism through the establishment of a Federal-level interministerial committee and state-level committees on children in the three affected states. In January 2015, the Minister of Justice issued an advisory reiterating the prohibition of recruitment and use of children. In response to the number of schools affected by the conflict and following the abduction of the Chibok girls, the Government also launched the "Safe Schools Initiative" aimed at providing remedial education and piloting 10 safe education facilities in the three affected states.

238. The threat of Boko Haram to regional stability prompted neighbouring countries to react by conducting joint operations and coordinating efforts through a Multinational Joint Task Force composed of troops from Lake Chad Basin countries and Benin, and whose deployment was authorized by the African Union Peace and Security Council on 3 March 2015. Given the high numbers of children recruited or abducted by Boko Haram, it is of great concern that abductees or children associated with the group will be heavily affected in the course of military operations. In December, Cameroonian security forces reported the dismantling of an *almajiri* school near the border with Nigeria, where 84 boys aged between 4 and 17 years were found in the presence of instructors allegedly affiliated with Boko Haram. In April 2015, the boys were reportedly placed in a facility run by the Ministry of Social Welfare in northern Cameroon.

239. I urge the Government of Nigeria to take all necessary measures to protect children affected by the security situation and investigate the allegations of violations by its security forces as part of the military operations against Boko Haram and bring the perpetrators to justice. I also call upon regional countries participating in military operations against Boko Haram to carry out their operations against the group in compliance with international humanitarian, refugee and human rights law and to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of children and minimize the impact of the conflict on them. I welcome the fact that child protection provisions have been included in the Multinational Joint Task Force concept of operations. I reiterate that depriving children of their liberty should only be a measure of last resort and that children who are detained should be treated primarily as victims and handed over to child protection actors as soon as possible.

Pakistan

240. Pakistan continued to face significant security challenges, posed in particular by armed groups and extremist groups, with schools being particularly targeted. Hundreds of civilians were killed or injured in dozens of attacks. In response, the Government launched a major offensive in North Waziristan in June to reduce the capacity of armed groups to strike within the country. In one of the most alarming incidents of the reporting period, on 16 December, nine gunmen stormed the Army Public School in Peshawar, firing on pupils and staff indiscriminately, and utilizing improvised explosive devices and hand grenades to maximize casualties. At least 132 boys, as young as 8 years of age, and several teachers and other staff members were killed. At least 133 persons were injured, the vast majority of them children. The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the assault, stating that it was an act of revenge for the ongoing offensive in North Waziristan.

241. Although exact figures of child casualties were not always available, sectarian violence and hundreds of indiscriminate attacks, including by improvised explosive devices and suicide bombers, continued to affect children in several areas, with Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces most affected. In February, for example, in Peshawar, a suicide bomb in the crowded Koocha Risaldar area near Qissa Khawani bazaar reportedly killed 10 persons, the majority of whom were women and children, and injured 48 others.

242. Armed groups continued to regularly attack educational institutions. At least 40 secular schools were reportedly attacked, mainly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and in Balochistan Province. In

January, for example, a suicide bomber reportedly blew himself up outside the gates of a school in Hangu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, killing a 14-year-old boy who was trying to prevent the attacker from entering the school. In February, an improvised explosive device exploded outside school gates in Karak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, reportedly injuring 13 children and the school principal. In the wake of the December 16 attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar, all educational institutions across Pakistan were closed for a period of three to four weeks, thereby disrupting education.

243. Attacks on polio workers by TTP-affiliated and other armed elements continued unabated in 2014, resulting in the killing of at least nine such workers and several police and security personnel providing escorts for the conduct of polio campaigns. For example, in January, three persons were reportedly killed and two others injured by four armed elements in Karachi. In Balochistan, on 26 November, four polio workers, including three women, were reportedly shot dead and three other members of the polio vaccination team were wounded by two gunmen on a motorcycle. On 9 December, in Faisalabad, Punjab, a schoolteacher volunteering in a polio vaccination campaign was reportedly shot by armed elements on a motorcycle. The Taliban splinter faction Jundullah claimed responsibility for the attack.

244. Interaction on child protection between the United Nations and the Pakistani authorities continued throughout 2014. For example, with United Nations support, the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan approved a comparatively substantial budgetary allocation for the establishment of child protection services. One area of concern is the reports of detention of children for alleged association with armed groups and on national security charges. In January 2015, the Parliament of Pakistan passed a constitutional amendment on the establishment of military courts for a duration of 24 months, wherein civilian suspects accused of acts of terrorism will be tried. Military courts are inappropriate forums for hearing cases involving children since they do not fully recognize the special status of juveniles in conflict with the law. I urge the Government to ensure that any children arrested for their alleged associated with armed groups or under security charges are treated primarily as victims. In all circumstances children are entitled to benefit from the special status of juvenile in conflict with the law in conformity with international human rights law.

Philippines

245. In March, the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) signed a comprehensive agreement on the Bangasamoro that includes a transition plan on normalization towards the eventual decommissioning of the MILF Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF). The Government also continued to enhance the monitoring, reporting and response system to institutionalize the response to child rights violations. Meanwhile, the emergence of breakaway armed factions and localized community feuds involving armed elements continued to affect children. As at March 2015, intensive fighting was continuing between the Government and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG).

246. Noting that child recruitment is mostly likely underreported since communities are apprehensive about sharing information for fear of reprisals, the United Nations verified the recruitment and use of seven boys, as young as 9 years of age, by the

New People's Army (NPA) and ASG, marking a decrease from the 20 verified cases in 2013. For example, among the five boys recruited and used by ASG was a 9-year-old boy who was used as a weapons porter for approximately 18 months. After escaping, he was shot dead. ASG had previously told his family that the boy would be killed if he left. The recruitment of two boys by NPA, aged 15 and 16 years, was reported by their parents. The municipal police launched an investigation but the recruiter remained at large and an arrest warrant was issued.

247. Local communities continued to note that armed groups, including NPA and reportedly ASG, approached civilians including children, for recruitment purposes, offering them shelter, food, access to education or offering to support communities. In response, parents reportedly sent their children to urban centres for their protection.

248. On 3 July, a 14-year-old boy and his father were arrested by members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in Maguindanao, allegedly on suspicion of the father being affiliated with BIFF. The whereabouts of the father and the boy were unknown at the end of 2014, although an investigation was launched by the Regional Human Rights Commission of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.

249. The United Nations verified the killing of 13 children and the injury of 26 others in 22 separate incidents. In one incident, on 28 July, seven children were killed and six others, as young as 3 years of age, were wounded by ASG when their vehicle was ambushed. Ten incidents resulted from armed forces operations against BIFF and retaliatory attacks. One boy was killed and four children (two girls, two boys) were injured in armed clashes in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao resulting from conflicts involving MILF or Moro National Liberation Front commanders.

250. In five separate incidents, clashes between the armed forces and BIFF and between national police and NPA resulted in damage to schools, followed by suspension of classes. On 2 January, BIFF used a primary school in North Cotabato in operations against the armed forces and set the school on fire upon withdrawal. Concerns also persisted over threats made against teachers by ASG. In addition, the United Nations verified the military use of six schools and one hospital by the armed forces, mainly during operations against BIFF.

251. In June, the MILF leadership reappointed a panel to engage with the United Nations on a roadmap to expedite implementation of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and took a number of important steps, notably that of appointing focal points in all of its base and front commands, displaying command orders prohibiting the recruitment and use of children, including sanctions against perpetrators, facilitating orientations on the roles and responsibilities of BIAF members vis-à-vis the action plan, and submitting progress reports to the United Nations every two months. MILF has also guaranteed unhindered access for action plan-related activities, including verification exercises.

252. In partnership with the Bangsamoro Development Agency, the United Nations has established 16 community-based child protection networks in conflict-affected communities in Mindanao to strengthen their capacity to prevent and respond to all forms of child rights violations.

253. The armed forces, through their Human Rights Office, and in line with my recommendations to better protect children affected by the armed conflict in the Philippines (S/2013/419), continued to finalize a strategic framework to protect children during military operations. Some of these have already been implemented, including the guidelines on the conduct of activities in schools and hospitals.

254. I commend the progress made by MILF and urge it to identify all children associated with BIAF to ensure their separation in line with the action plan. I encourage both the Government of the Philippines and MILF to continue their sustained engagement to ensure the success of the peace process, which the United Nations stands ready to support.

Thailand

255. Armed violence in southern Thailand continued, with armed groups launching attacks against civilian targets and engaging in sporadic fighting with Government security forces. Peace talks between the Government and armed groups, facilitated by Malaysia, began in 2014.

256. The United Nations continued to receive reports on the recruitment and use of children by armed groups. Children reportedly received military training and were used as lookouts, informers and combatants. For instance, a 14-year-old boy allegedly associated with an armed group was reportedly killed in a gunfight with civil defence forces in Narathiwat Province in August. Concerns persist over the informal association of children with civil defence groups providing security for transportation routes, teachers and schools. Reports also continue regarding the administrative detention of children for alleged association with armed groups.

257. The United Nations received reports of 57 incidents in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat that resulted in the killing of 23 children and maiming of 65. The incidents included shootings and improvised explosive device attacks. For example, on 3 February, three boys, between 6 and 11 years of age, were reportedly killed by gunshots during a targeted attack on their family by armed elements.

258. Armed groups continued to target teachers and education personnel, often using brutal threats and acts. According to the Ministry of Education, six teachers, one education personnel and 10 students were killed in 2014, while three teachers, one education personnel and 15 students were injured. In a worrisome example, in March, insurgents shot a teacher while she was riding a motorcycle to work at Tabing Tingi Community School. The assailants reportedly then poured gasoline on her body and set it on fire. A leaflet, with the words "This attack is in revenge for the killing of innocent people," was found nearby.

259. In line with that trend, in November, banners threatening teachers were found in several parts of Yala. Soldiers and police who have been providing security escorts for teachers in the affected region have also come under fire. In November, 18 members of an armed group launched an attack on a security escort, killing four soldiers and injuring two others. In October, eight schools in the provinces of Pattani and Narathiwat were burned at night. No group claimed responsibility for the attacks. However, according to some reports, it was retaliation by a National Revolutionary Front-led armed group for attacks by the Royal Thai Army. The Government arrested eight persons in October, who reportedly confessed to carrying out the attack.

260. In May and August, for the first time since the escalation of violence in 2014, three hospitals were attacked in Pattani and Songkhla. In one attack, a parked motorcycle exploded and set fire to adjacent areas in the bombing at the Khok Pho hospital, resulting in serious injury to a 3-year-old girl.

261. In my previous two annual reports, I welcomed the fact that the Government and the United Nations country team were engaging in dialogue on access to the southern border provinces to conduct independent verification and report on alleged violations against children. I am concerned that progress has still not been achieved on the issue of access for monitoring and verification, and again strongly urge the Government to facilitate independent access.

IV. Recommendations

262. **I am deeply concerned at the increase of grave violations outlined in the present report and call upon all parties to immediately end, and take all measures to prevent, grave violations against children.**

263. **Accountability is crucial to preventing grave violations, and I urge Member States to place it at the core of national and international responses to violations.**

264. **I call upon Member States to ensure that their response to threats to peace and security are conducted in full compliance with international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights law. Member States should ensure that responses include specific mitigating measures for the protection of children.**

265. **I strongly urge all parties listed in the annexes to the present report who have not yet done so to enter into dialogue with the United Nations to agree on and implement measures to end grave violations and assist victims.**

266. **I call upon Member States to allow independent access to the United Nations for the purposes of monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children.**

267. **I also call upon Member States to facilitate contact between the United Nations and non-State armed groups for dialogue and follow-up on action plans in order to bring an end to violations. Such dialogue does not prejudge the political or legal status of those non-State armed groups.**

268. **I urge Member States to consider alternatives to the deprivation of liberty or prosecution of children for their alleged or actual association with armed groups or as part of counter-terrorism measures. At a minimum, Member States should ensure that procedures or trials are consistent with international juvenile justice standards and the principle of the best interests of the child.**

269. **The recruitment and use of children by extremist groups pose new challenges with regard to their protection, rehabilitation and reintegration. I encourage Member States to highlight and address the need for prevention and appropriate measures to rehabilitate those children recruited and used, including education programmes and vocational training, in compliance with the principle of the best interest of the child and respecting the child's primary status as a victim.**

270. **I encourage Member States, regional organizations, international mediators and special envoys to continue including child protection provisions in peace negotiations and agreements.**

271. **I welcome the leadership and contribution of regional and subregional organizations in the protection of children. I call upon regional and subregional organizations to continue integrating child protection considerations in their policies, planning of peace support operations, training of personnel and conduct of operations.**

272. **I call upon all parties to respect the civilian character of schools and cease attacks against them and attacks and threats of attacks against students and teachers.**

273. **I call upon the Council to expand the tools available to child protection actors to gather information and report on the abduction of children, including through adding abductions as a trigger violation for listing in the annexes of the present report.**

274. **I also call upon the Council to continue to support the children and armed conflict agenda by strengthening provisions for the protection of children in all relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping, special political and peacebuilding missions. I also welcome and encourage the inclusion of grave violations against children as criteria for sanctions in Security Council committees.**

275. **I welcome the engagement and progress made so far regarding the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign. I call upon all Member States to continue to mobilize political and financial support to ensure that progress achieved is institutionalized and durable.**

276. **I again urge all Member States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three Optional Protocols.**

V. Observations

277. The present report clearly lays out the egregious violations to which children were subject during the reporting period in countries affected by conflict. In several situations, in particular the Central African Republic, Iraq, Israel/State of Palestine, Nigeria, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, children were affected to a degree which is an affront to our common humanity. The facts as presented in the body of the present report speak for themselves and should shock our collective conscience.

278. I am more convinced than ever that the United Nations and Member States must continue to give the protection of children affected by armed conflict the highest priority. Their plight should be the primary reason not to start conflicts and the primary reason to end them.

279. Determining responsibility for the killing and maiming and other grave violations against children raises the question of intention, although what is relevant is respect for international legal obligations and the impact on children. The case has been made by some parties to conflict that targeting children was never a policy or practice and that it was merely the unintended consequence of military action. In

2015, however, the case has been made in such a way that the integrity of the listing mechanism established by the Security Council to protect children has been threatened. This is deplorable.

280. I would like to put all parties to conflict on notice that those that engage in military action resulting in numerous grave violations against children will, regardless of intent, find themselves under continued scrutiny by the United Nations, including in future reports relating to children and armed conflict. Member States must re-examine existing policies and practices to stop and prevent grave violations against children. Member States must also be held to account and they, in turn, must hold perpetrators accountable.

281. I call upon all Member States not to lose sight of the vital objective at stake here: protecting children — a moral imperative and a legal obligation. Member States therefore must ensure that all avenues to protect children affected by armed conflict are identified and pursued. I urge all the parties to conflict identified in the report to work with my Special Representative to prevent future grave violations against children.

VI. Lists in the annexes to the present report

282. There are no new parties listed in the report. In the Central African Republic, local defence militias known as the anti-Balaka, already listed for recruitment and use and killing and maiming of children, are now listed for sexual violence against children. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), who were already included in annex I for the recruitment and use of children and for attacks on schools and hospitals, are listed for the killing and maiming of children. In Iraq, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)/Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) are now listed for sexual violence against children under the name Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), in addition to the three other listed violations. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) are further listed for sexual violence against children and attacks on schools and hospitals, also under the name ISIL. In Nigeria, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), also known as Boko Haram, is now additionally listed for the recruitment and use of children, having been previously listed for killing and maiming and sexual violence against children.

283. Other changes in the list resulted from the fragmentation of previously listed parties or other changes in the landscape of armed conflict in respective situations. In the Central African Republic, the situation remains complex and fluid. Some factions listed in 2014 under the "ex-Séléka coalition and associated armed groups" disappeared, while others emerged. For the current listing, the umbrella "ex-Séléka coalition and associated armed groups" is used. In the Syrian Arab Republic, Jhabat Al-Nusra is now listed as Al-Nusra Front (ANF).

284. In a unilateral declaration made in Nairobi on 12 December 2013, the M23 announced the end of its rebellion and its transformation into a political party, and was removed from annex I. In relation to Yemen, given the constant changing nature of the situation, no changes have been made to the annexes from the previous report, but changes may be made in future years.

Annex I

List of parties that recruit or use children, kill or maim children, commit rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, or engage in attacks on schools and/or hospitals in situations of armed conflict on the agenda of the Security Council*

Parties in Afghanistan

1. Afghan National Police, including the Afghan Local Police[a,•]
2. Haqqani Network[a,b]
3. Hezb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar[a,b]
4. Taliban forces, including the Tora Bora Front, the Jamat Sunat al-Dawa Salafia and the Latif Mansur Network[a,b,d]

Parties in the Central African region (Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan)

1. Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)[a,b,c]

Parties in the Central African Republic

1. Ex-Séléka coalition and associated armed groups[a,b,c,d]
2. Local defence militias known as the anti-Balaka[a,b,c]

Parties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

1. Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)[a,b,d]
2. Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC)[a,c,•]
3. Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR)[a,c,d]
4. Front de résistance patriotique en Ituri (FRPI)[a,c,d]
5. Mayi Mayi Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain (APCLS) "Colonel Janvier"[a]
6. Mayi Mayi "Lafontaine" and former elements of the Patriotes résistants congolais (PARECO)[a]
7. Mayi Mayi Simba "Morgan"[a,c]
8. Mayi Mayi Kata Katanga[a]

* The parties underlined have been in the annexes for at least five years and are therefore considered persistent perpetrators.
[a] Parties that recruit and use children.
[b] Parties that kill and maim children.
[c] Parties that commit rape and other forms of sexual violence against children.
[d] Parties that engage in attacks on schools and/or hospitals.
• This party has concluded an action plan with the United Nations in line with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005).

9. Nduma Defence Coalition (NDC)/Cheka[a,b]
10. Mayi Mayi Nyatura[a]

Parties in Iraq

1. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)[a,b,c,d]

Parties in Mali

1. Mouvement national de liberation de l'Azawad (MNLA)[a,c]
2. Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO)[a,c]
3. Ansar Dine[a,c]

Parties in Myanmar

1. Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)[a]
2. Kachin Independence Army (KIA)[a]
3. Karen National Liberation Army (KNU/KNLA)[a]
4. Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council[a]
5. Karenni Army (KNPP/KA)[a]
6. Shan State Army South (SSA-S)[a]
7. Tatmadaw Kyi, including integrated border guard forces[a,*]
8. United Wa State Army (UWSA)[a]

Parties in Somalia

1. Al Shabaab[a,b]
2. Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah (ASWJ)[a]
3. Somali National Army[a,b,*]

Parties in South Sudan

1. Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)[a,b,*]
2. SPLA in Opposition[a]
3. White Army[a,b]

Parties in Sudan

1. Government security forces, including the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), the Popular Defense Forces (PDF) and the Sudan Police Forces[a]
2. Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)[a]
3. Pro-Government militias[a]
4. Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid[a]
5. Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi[a]

6. Sudan People's Liberation Movement North (SPLM-N)[a]

Parties in the Syrian Arab Republic

1. Ahrar al-Sham al-Islami[a,b]
2. Free Syrian Army (FSA) — affiliated groups[a]
3. Government forces, including the National Defence Forces and the Shabbiha militia[b,c,d]
4. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)[a,b,c,d]
5. al-Nusra Front (Jhabat Al-Nusra)[a,b]
6. People Protection Units (YPG)[a]

Parties in Yemen

1. Al-Houthi/Ansar Allah[a]
2. Al-Qaida in the Arab Peninsula (AQIP)/Ansar al-Sharia[a]
3. Government forces, including the Yemeni Armed Forces, the First Armoured Division, the Military Police, the special security forces and Republican Guards[a,e]
4. Pro-Government militias, including the Salafists and Popular Committees[a]

Annex II

List of parties that recruit or use children, kill or maim children, commit rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, or engage in attacks on schools and/or hospitals in situations of armed conflict not on the agenda of the Security Council, or in other situations*

Parties in Colombia

1. Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)[a]
2. Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP)[a]

Parties in Nigeria

1. Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad also known as Boko Haram[a,b,d]

Parties in the Philippines

1. Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)[a]
2. Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)[a]
3. Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)[a,•]
4. New People's Army (NPA)[a]

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* The parties underlined have been in the annexes for at least five years and are therefore considered persistent perpetrators.

[a] Parties that recruit and use children.

[b] Parties that kill and maim children.

[c] Parties that commit rape and other forms of sexual violence against children.

[d] Parties that engage in attacks on schools and/or hospitals.

• This party has concluded an action plan with the United Nations in line with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005).

United Nations A/69/927

General Assembly

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Sixty-ninth session
Agenda item 14
Culture of peace

Letter dated 4 June 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Benin to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

At the invitation of the Government of Benin, the Symposium for the launching of the African Initiative on Education for Peace and Development through Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue was held in Cotonou, Benin, from 26 to 28 May 2015, under the patronage of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), with the support of the United Nations, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the West African Economic and Monetary Union, the Council of the Entente, the International Organization of la Francophonie and others.

The Government of Benin expresses its gratitude for the support of the United Nations system in organizing this historic meeting, inter alia, through technical support from the Office of the United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations during the preparatory intellectual process.

The Symposium participants adopted the Manifesto on Education for Peace and Development through Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue, the full text of which I am transmitting herewith (see annex). The Manifesto is in line with the efforts of the international community to implement the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted by the General Assembly on 8 September 2006 in its resolution 60/288.

The Government of Benin would highly appreciate the support the United Nations system might contribute to the implementation of the Manifesto.

Accordingly, I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Jean-Francis R. **Zinsou**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 4 June 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Benin to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Manifesto on Education for Peace and Development through Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue

Coming from a broad range of religious, spiritual, cultural, social, economic and political backgrounds from across Africa and around the world, upon the initiative of the Pan-African Social Prospects Centre and at the invitation of the Government of Benin, we, the participants in the Symposium for the launching of the African Initiative on Education for Peace and Development through Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue, held in Cotonou, Benin, from 26 to 28 May 2010, under the patronage of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), with the support of the United Nations, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the West African Economic and Monetary Union, the Council of the Entente, the International Organization of la Francophonie, and others, after asking for God's blessing and unanimously paying tribute to the memory of one of the major leaders of the continent, Mr. Jean Pliya, following fruitful discussions on the subject of the Symposium and upon the completion of our work, adopt this Manifesto.

1. United by the recognition of the dignity of every human person as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and national constitutions and as recognized by all religions and cultures as the common heritage of the wisdom of humanity;

2. Considering that peace, security, development and human rights are closely linked and mutually reinforcing;

3. Aware that the use of the violence of weapons to oppose the violence and terror spread by the proponents of political and religious extremism, even if it is legitimate, cannot be an effective and sustainable response, given the impossibility of placing a soldier behind every citizen to ensure his or her safety;

4. Convinced that education for peace and development through interfaith and intercultural dialogue has great potential for strengthening the foundations of sustainable peace and equitable development;

5. Convinced that freedom from war is an essential condition for well-being, sustainable development and the full enjoyment of human rights;

6. Rejecting the use of all forms of violence and stressing that only peaceful economic, political and sociocultural solutions can ensure a stable and democratic future for all the peoples of the world;

7. Emphasizing the need to strengthen good governance and build more open and more inclusive societies;

8. Seeking to contribute to achieving the vision of the African Union, namely, an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the globai arena;

9. Committed to cultural diversity as a source of enrichment of peoples and nations, in accordance with the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and the Charter for the Cultural Renaissance of Africa in which African States recognize cultural diversity as a force for the mutual enrichment of peoples and nations;

10. Recognizing that peaceful coexistence among different religious and cultural communities is an invaluable asset for peace and the harmonious development of peoples, as development is another name for peace;

11. Building on the solemn affirmation in the preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO that since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed, and on the conclusions of the Pan African Forum held by UNESCO in Luanda from 26 to 28 March 2013, on the theme "Sources and resources for a culture of peace";

12. Expressing our deep appreciation for the work of the interfaith councils of the African Council of Religious Leaders — Religions for Peace, and for the initiative of the African Union Interfaith Dialogue Forum and that of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations;

13. We proclaim that respect for the dignity of others and their religious and philosophical beliefs as well as exchange and contact are the true foundations of interfaith and intercultural dialogue;

14. Underscore that the path of interfaith and intercultural dialogue must be built on the values of mutual respect, exchange and contact, which are non-negotiable prerequisites for "living together", consisting of a "common desire to live together" in diversity, particularly diversity of religions, spiritual beliefs, cultures, and political and social preferences, as seen in the pluralistic, resilient and peaceful practices observed on the African continent and in its diaspora;

15. Stress the utmost importance of the right to scientific progress, the right to mutual and inclusive development, and education for peace as a tool to promote the realization of peoples' right to peace, and urge States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to participate actively in this effort;

16. Propose, as an alternative to the use of force, the promotion of education for peace and development through interfaith and intercultural dialogue at the level of the family unit by increasing the involvement of women and youth;

17. Condemn the warmongers and arms dealers and all forms of domination, exclusion, and religious, spiritual, cultural, political or social discrimination, which, under the false pretext of defending freedom or religion, are attempts to wield power by force, causing injustices that at times give birth to despair and violent extremism;

18. Call for improved governance of information and communications technologies and social media so that they are instruments of reconciliation among peoples and so that their use, as should be the case with print media, contributes to awareness-raising and the education of people, especially young people, in this sensitive area;

19. Strongly advocate for establishing and implementing a national policy of peace through dialogue to act together, through the design, planning and

management of development projects that broadly involve religious and cultural sensitivities at all levels;

20. Strongly recommend the establishment of a continental network of African parliamentarians for peace through interfaith and intercultural dialogue, with the goal, inter alia, of ensuring that the budget for each State provides for ongoing and consistent funding to support development activities designed and implemented jointly as part of an active interfaith and intercultural dialogue;

21. Propose the establishment of a network of African women for education for peace and development through interfaith and intercultural dialogue;

22. Call on all States to integrate education for peace and development through interfaith and intercultural dialogue in all educational programmes and formal and informal training;

23. Urge all international and African organizations to include education for peace and development through interfaith and intercultural dialogue in their programmes and activities for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, taking into account the need to mainstream gender and youth in those activities;

24. Recommend the establishment of interfaith councils comprised of women, men and young people across all countries of the continent and the diaspora;

25. Decide to establish, in order to ensure the effective implementation of the recommendations of the Symposium, a follow-up mechanism with the support of the Government of Benin, ECOWAS, the African Union, the United Nations and key partners committed to providing practical support to the African Initiative on Education for Peace and Development through Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue.

Cotonou, 28 May 2015

The Symposium

United Nations A/69/928–S/2015/457

General Assembly
Security Council

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General Assembly
Sixty-ninth session
Agenda items 66, 68, 82 and 129

Security Council
Seventieth year

Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

Promotion and protection of human rights

The rule of law at the national and international levels

Seventieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War

Identical letters dated 18 June 2015 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 9 June 2015, which I received from Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, and a joint response of the European Union to the report entitled "Neo-Nazism: a dangerous threat to human rights, democracy and the rule of law", issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter and its annex to the attention of Member States and observer missions.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon

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Annex

At the end of April 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation issued a report entitled "Neo-Nazism: a dangerous threat to human rights, democracy and the rule of law", which has been circulated as a document of the United Nations at the request of its Permanent Representative.

The European Union has already repeatedly stated its position on the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including neo-Nazism, most recently in its comprehensive explanation of the vote (see A/69/486 and A/C.3/69/SR.50) delivered before the adoption on 21 November 2014 of resolution 69/160 on combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, in which the European Union stressed that that fight should not be misused for political purposes.

In addition, I have the honour to convey to you the attached joint response of the European Union, specifically addressing the above-mentioned report from the Russian Federation (see enclosure).

I kindly request that the present letter and its enclosure be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 66, 68, 82 and 129, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Thomas **Mayr-Harting**
Ambassador

Enclosure

European Union joint response to the report entitled "Neo-Nazism: a dangerous threat to human rights, democracy and the rule of law", issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

We are aware that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation issued a report entitled "Neo-Nazism: a dangerous threat to human rights, democracy and the rule of law" at the end of April 2015 and that the Russian Federation has requested that the report be circulated as a document of the United Nations.

The report contains factual inaccuracies and selective information on the situation in the European Union and its member States. The report is also geographically incomplete. A chapter on the situation in the Russian Federation, for example, is missing.

The European Union regrets that the Russian Federation tries to establish parallels between current and past political developments in the context of the ongoing crises.

The European Union is committed to the global fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including anti-Semitism and neo-Nazism. The European Union and its member States continue to take firm steps to address this at home, including in the context of the framework decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law. Their condemnation and combat must be a common and consensual priority for the entire international community. The European Union calls on all States Members of the United Nations to remain united in efforts to fight racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including anti-Semitism and neo-Nazism, to tackle hate crimes and hate-speech decisively and to cooperate in this regard.

United Nations A/69/929–S/2015/422

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Security Council

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General Assembly
Sixty-ninth session
Agenda item 37
The situation in Afghanistan

Security Council
Seventieth year

The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/11 and Security Council resolution 2210 (2015), in which I was requested to report every three months on developments in Afghanistan.

2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including significant humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since the issuance of my previous report, of 27 February 2015 (A/69/801-S/2015/151). It also provides a summary of key political and security developments and regional and international events related to Afghanistan.

II. Relevant developments

3. The appointment of all cabinet members brought the formation of the National Unity Government to near completion. With a cabinet all but in place, efforts were reinvigorated for advancing the reform agenda of President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. Implementation of socioeconomic policies remained a pressing concern, however, and additional appointments, including at the provincial level, were still pending. While the establishment of the Special Commission on Electoral Reform provided a mechanism for advancing towards the agreed goal of enhancing electoral integrity, the Commission has yet to start its work, and the electoral calendar has yet to be announced. Efforts by the Government continued with regard to commencing a process for peace and reconciliation, including the mobilization of backing by regional partners. Conflict-related violence increased as the Afghan National Security Forces sought to contain insurgent activity whose intensification resulted in record high levels of civilian casualties.

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A. Political developments

4. Since my previous report, the formation of the National Unity Government was completed, after the 16 ministerial nominations announced by President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah on 21 March were confirmed by the lower house of the National Assembly on 18 April, and President Ghani announced the nomination of a candidate for Minister of Defence on 23 May. Of the 24 ministers confirmed to date, four are women. Other important positions remain to be filled, including the Governor of the Central Bank, the Attorney-General and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. On 25 April, the lower house of the National Assembly approved the appropriation of a budget for the Office of the Chief Executive and a Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, which had been created by presidential decree. On 26 April, Chief Executive Abdullah appointed the Head of the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers.

5. On 7 April the President announced an initiative to establish a social contract between the Government and citizens of the country, in keeping with the reform agenda presented at the London Conference on Afghanistan. In the first meeting of the cabinet, on 23 April, President Ghani instructed ministers to formulate strategies for their first 100 days in office. On 26 May, at an extraordinary cabinet meeting, President Ghani announced the launch of those plans by the ministries. The President stated that the plans would be presented by each minister publicly in order to promote accountability and would be reviewed at the end of the period. He also stressed the importance of coordination by the ministries to improve service delivery.

6. On 27 April, the Office of the President announced the appointment of the Head of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, as well as the governors for Kandahar and Herat Provinces. As at 27 May, governors were appointed for 12 out of 34 provinces, leaving 22 provinces led by acting governors. Consistent with the ministerial appointments process, President Ghani excluded incumbents from reappointment.

7. From 22 to 25 March, President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah visited Washington, D.C., where President Ghani met with the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama. In a joint statement issued on 24 March, they announced a new development partnership, in which up to $800 million in bilateral economic assistance would be earmarked for Afghan development and reform priorities; the United States would maintain its posture of 9,800 troops through the end of 2015; and the outcome of any Afghan-led peace process would include the Taliban and other armed opposition groups ending the violence, breaking ties with international terrorist groups and accepting Afghanistan's Constitution. On 26 March, I met with President Ghani and underlined the steadfast commitment of the United Nations to the development of a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

8. In their 21 September 2014 agreement to establish a National Unity Government, President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah agreed to undertake electoral reforms. Limited progress has been made in that regard. On 21 March, President Ghani issued a presidential decree establishing a 15-member Special Commission on Electoral Reform. A member of the lower house of the National Assembly was selected to lead the Commission. The process for fully institutionalizing the Commission remained unclear owing to ongoing discussions

between the offices of the President and the Chief Executive about the chairmanship and confirmation of its operational modalities.

9. According to the Constitution, Parliamentary elections should have taken place between 21 April and 21 May 2015. The current mandate of the lower house of the National Assembly expires on 22 June. On 1 April, the Second Vice-President, Mohammad Sarwar Danish, announced a delay of the Parliamentary elections until 2016, citing the need to allow time for the implementation of electoral reforms. Asserting that the mandate to announce and manage the electoral calendar rested solely with the Independent Election Commission, the Chair of the Commission, Ahmad Yousuf Nuristani, argued that postponing the vote was contrary to Afghan law and noted that proposals had been sent by the Commission to the Government on possible electoral dates. In the absence of an electoral calendar and concrete steps towards electoral reform, and citing the need for greater government funding of elections, international donors announced the scaling down of funding for the Afghan electoral institutions. As a result, the Independent Election Commission and Independent Electoral Complaints Commission began the process of reducing staff and assessing ways to lower monthly running costs, while seeking a supplementary budget through the Finance Ministry to maintain core capacities.

10. On 11 March, the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission released a final report on alleged fraud during the 2014 presidential and provincial council elections. As a result, 9,887 temporary Independent Election Commission staff members (out of a total 107,479) at 3,189 polling stations (out of a total of 22,778) were barred from re-employment by the Commission. In addition, three permanent Election Commission staff members were dismissed, as were eight permanent Complaints Commission staff members.

11. On 4 March, President Ghani issued a decree restoring the oversight powers of provincial councils over local government departments. That action ended a strike by provincial councils that had commenced after the lower house of the National Assembly had voted to remove the oversight powers on 28 January.

12. President Ghani continued to engage with Afghan and regional interlocutors to promote national reconciliation. On 30 April, during his visit to India, President Ghani took the opportunity to express openness to the Taliban and other anti-Government groups playing a role within the political landscape of Afghanistan, as distinct from "foreign terrorist fighters" whom he stated had no place in Afghanistan's future. In a joint press conference on 12 May during the visit to Kabul of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, President Ghani underlined that the two countries faced common enemies, a statement echoed by Prime Minister Sharif. In his domestic outreach, President Ghani publicly assured Afghan society, including political parties, religious scholars, tribal elders and civil society activists, that a potential peace process would be conducted in an inclusive and transparent manner. In that regard, it was emphasized by government officials that any negotiations with the Taliban would preserve the achievements of the past 14 years, including women's rights, and would reaffirm Afghanistan's national interests, also in relation to its neighbours. On 2 and 3 May, a "track-two" meeting was convened in Qatar by a non-governmental organization. A diverse group of Afghans attended in their personal capacities.

13. In support of a rights-based approach to a durable peace process, the civil society-led Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace commenced its third phase of

activities, focusing on convening policymakers and civil society organizations to assist in the implementation of national and provincial road maps for peace. Facilitation is provided by the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

14. The joint secretariat of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme reported that as at 30 April 2015 a total of 10,240 individuals, including 949 commanders, had joined the programme, and 7,813 weapons had been collected, since the inception of the programme in August 2010. In addition to drawing low-level fighters off the battlefield, the programme continued to support livelihood and reintegration opportunities to support former combatants and their communities.

B. Security

15. The security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated, as anti-Government elements continued to test the capability and resolve of the Afghan National Security Forces across the country. In the week after the 22 April announcement by the Taliban of the start of the spring offensive there was a 45 per cent increase in recorded armed clashes, compared with 2014.

16. As mentioned above, the United States and Afghanistan announced in their joint statement that the United States would maintain its current posture of 9,800 troops through the end of 2015. The non-combat Resolute Support Mission of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) continued to train, advise and assist the Afghan National Security Forces. At a meeting held in Antalya, Turkey, on 13 May, NATO Ministers for Foreign Affairs endorsed a set of guidelines and principles for NATO post-2016 support to the Afghan National Security Forces. Following the closure of the Resolute Support Mission at the end of 2016, the NATO-Afghanistan enhanced enduring partnership will be civilian-led but will maintain a military component. The Taliban condemned both developments.

17. Between 15 February and 30 April, the United Nations recorded 5,033 security-related incidents across the country, representing a 6 per cent increase against the same period in 2014 and a 45 per cent increase against the same period in 2013. The southern, south-eastern and eastern regions continued to account for the majority of security incidents in the country, with 71 per cent of the total incidents recorded during the period. The northern and north-eastern regions showed an increase of 12 per cent in security incident levels compared with the same period in 2014.

18. In the 22 April announcement of the spring offensive, named "Azm", the Taliban declared that targets would be "foreign occupiers especially their permanent military bases, their intelligence and diplomatic centres", as well as government officials and Afghan security forces. Although attacks were recorded on several international military bases, they amounted during the period to less than 1 per cent of recorded incidents. As seen in past offensives and during the period as a whole, the Afghan security forces and government personnel and facilities were the main target of Taliban operations.

19. The security situation in the northern province of Kunduz deteriorated significantly with the launch on 25 April of a major assault by anti-Government elements, comprised of the Taliban, and, most likely, foreign fighters pushed into Afghanistan from their bases in North Waziristan following counter-insurgency

operations by the Pakistani military. This necessitated the deployment of reinforcements by Afghan security forces to contain the situation and ensure the security of the provincial capital, Kunduz City, as well as the district administrative centres. With the deployment of additional security forces, the situation reportedly stabilized. Anti-Government elements launched additional operations, aimed at undermining the credibility of the security forces, in other provinces including Badakhshan, Badghis, Faryab and Kunar.

20. Responding to heightened concerns over the security situation, the Government underlined to the public and members of the National Assembly the efforts of the Afghan security forces. Since assuming the responsibility for security, the Afghan security forces continued to plan and launch operations countrywide. After undertaking a large scale operation in Hilmand Province between mid-February and mid-April, Afghan security forces conducted similar scale operations in Faryab, Kunduz and Nangarhar. Additional operations took place in other areas that had long been under the control of insurgents, such as the Nawa District in Ghazni Province.

21. Attrition rates for both the security forces and anti-Government elements reportedly increased as the fighting intensified. The Ministry of Interior confirmed a significant increase in casualties sustained by the security forces in the first 15 weeks of the year, while both government and independent estimates indicated that insurgents suffered similarly high losses.

22. Established trends in the typology of reported security incidents remained unchanged, with armed clashes accounting for the majority (54 per cent) of security incidents, followed by improvised explosive devices accounting for 28 per cent of total incidents. Anti-Government elements also sought to exert influence through intimidation, including targeted killings. In total, from 15 February to 30 April, 160 assassinations and 40 failed assassination attempts were recorded, representing a 10 per cent increase against the same period in 2014. In addition, 91 abductions were recorded across the country during the reporting period, representing a 21.3 per cent increase, compared with the same period in 2014. Suicide attacks decreased from 25 to 23 compared with the same period in 2014. There were several high-profile incidents during the reporting period in Kabul City, including the assassination of the Chief of Police of Uruzgan on 18 March, two suicide car bomb attacks on international military forces on 26 February and 10 April and an attack on a private guesthouse on 13 May. The Taliban claimed responsibility for all four attacks. Responsibility for an unsuccessful suicide attack on a member of the National Assembly on 29 March has not been claimed by any insurgent group.

23. In May 2015, the Ministry of Interior estimated that there were some 7,180 foreign fighters across Afghanistan, the majority associated with Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. There was continued speculation on the presence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and affiliated groups. On 31 March, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan reportedly pledged allegiance to ISIL, and there were further unconfirmed reports of several extremist insurgent groups also joining ISIL. However, despite the initial attribution of several attacks, most notably a suicide attack on a bank in Jalalabad on 18 April, there remained a lack of clarity on any operational presence by ISIL.

24. During the reporting period there were 27 security incidents involving United Nations personnel, including 12 incidents of intimidation, 3 detentions, 8 criminal-

related, 3 attacks with small arms fire on United Nations convoys in the provinces of Balkh, Herat and Nangarhar and 1 brief abduction of a United Nations national staff member in the south-eastern region.

C. Regional cooperation

25. Afghanistan's National Unity Government continued its active engagement with regional partners. On 19 and 20 April, President Ghani visited the Islamic Republic of Iran. After meetings with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani, the two countries pledged greater cooperation in the areas of security information sharing, counter-narcotics, the sharing of water resources, and refugees and migrants. From 27 to 29 April, President Ghani travelled to India, where he met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Shri Pranab Mukherjee. India reiterated its readiness to join the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement. On 11 May, the lower house of the National Assembly ratified a strategic partnership agreement with Turkey, aimed at promoting further cooperation in the fields of governance, and social, economic and political affairs.

26. Discussions on Afghanistan, including on security and economic issues, continued in multilateral cooperation forums. Activities under the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process included two regional technical group meetings on confidence-building measures, namely, counter-terrorism on 11 March in Ankara and counter-narcotics on 29 April in Baku. On 25 May, a meeting of Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process senior officials was held in Islamabad. The discussions centred on regional cooperation to address security challenges and the Afghan peace process, including the role of the region, as well as regional priorities for economic connectivity. On 21 May, the International Contact Group on Afghanistan met in Kabul to consider issues related to security, the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, human rights, elections and regional dialogue.

27. At meetings of the Collective Security Treaty Organization on 2 April and the Commonwealth of Independent States on 3 April, ministers for foreign affairs discussed the situation in Afghanistan. Central Asian representatives expressed increasing concern at the spread of violent extremism from Afghanistan and agreed to strengthen their southern borders. Similar concerns were expressed during the 14 April meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Moscow, at which Afghanistan was represented for the first time as an observer.

28. From 4 to 6 March, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force held a workshop in Ashgabat on counter-terrorism and a border security workshop. Participants agreed that securing borders required a multidimensional approach incorporating development and technological aspects, backed by political will. United Nations entities and the Governments of Afghanistan and Tajikistan also organized a conference on counter-terrorism in Dushanbe on 14 and 15 May. Participants shared views on lessons learned from the development of an action plan for implementation of the United Nations counter-terrorism strategy in Central Asia, for possible use in the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

29. On 9 and 10 April in Dushanbe, experts from the three countries finalized the draft Afghanistan-Pakistan-Tajikistan Trilateral Transit Trade Agreement. On 24 April, the Ministers of Water and Power of Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Tajikistan signed the final pending documents for the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project. Construction is scheduled to begin in September 2015, with completion planned for 2018. Afghanistan is to receive 300 of the 1,300 MW of electricity delivered from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as revenue from transit fees.

30. A number of high-level contacts between Afghanistan and Pakistan took place towards improving their bilateral relationship and demonstrating the will of both countries to enhance their political and military cooperation. During his visit to Kabul on 12 May, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan reiterated his country's support for the National Unity Government and for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. Visits to Kabul were made by Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, the Head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, former President Asif Ali Zardari and former Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani. On 18 May, the Afghan National Directorate of Security and the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence signed a memorandum of understanding on counter-terrorism cooperation. The memorandum sparked intense discussions within the Afghan National Assembly and political sphere, with the National Directorate of Security subsequently issuing a statement on 24 May in which it noted that the memorandum would be finalized only after wider consultations. On 26 May, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Hekmat Karzai, and the Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, Aizaz Chaudhry, met in Islamabad to discuss a number of issues pertaining to peace and stability, counter-terrorism, border security, economic cooperation, Afghan refugees and regional cooperation.

III. Human rights

31. Between 15 February and 30 April, UNAMA documented 2,126 civilian casualties (669 killed and 1,457 injured), reflecting a sharp increase of 23 per cent over the same period in 2014. The trend of record high numbers of civilian casualties continued. UNAMA attributed 1,545 civilian casualties (534 killed and 1,011 injured) to anti-Government elements, accounting for 73 per cent of total civilian casualties. UNAMA recorded 302 civilian casualties (74 killed and 228 injured) attributed to pro-Government forces (11 per cent to Afghan National Security Forces, 2 per cent to pro-Government militia and 1 per cent to international military forces), an 88 per cent increase, accounting for 14 per cent of total civilian casualties. Eight per cent of all civilian casualties resulted from unattributed crossfire between pro-Government forces and anti-Government elements while 5 per cent were mainly from unattributed explosive remnants of war. Ground engagements continued to be the leading cause of civilian casualties, causing 617 civilian casualties (150 killed and 467 injured), followed by improvised explosive devices, accounting for 503 civilian casualties (162 killed and 341 injured).

32. Large-scale attacks by anti-Government elements deliberately targeting civilians continued during the reporting period. On 18 April, a suicide attacker detonated his explosive vest at the entrance of a bank in Jalalabad City, Nangarhar Province, targeting civilian government officials who were collecting their salaries and killing 30 civilians and injuring 123 others. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the 13 May attack on a Kabul guest house, at which a cultural event was being

hosted, resulting in 14 civilian deaths and injuries to several others. Civilian casualties attributed to pro-Government forces included an incident on 24 April in Alingar District, Laghman Province, in which a mortar round fired by the Afghan National Army impacted a civilian residence, killing seven civilians and injuring eight. The national army reported that they had fired the mortar following an attack against an army check post.

33. From 1 January to 10 May, the Taliban claimed responsibility for 11 separate attacks against legal professionals and courthouses, causing 114 civilian casualties, with 28 killed and 86 injured, an increase of more than 600 per cent over the same period the previous year. Figures recorded by UNAMA indicate higher casualty numbers than those claimed by the Taliban, as well as an additional six incidents of abductions, threats, intimidations and harassment of judicial authorities. This included the 9 April attack against the office of the Attorney General in Mazar-e-Sharif and the two suicide attacks on 4 and 10 May against civilian buses transporting employees of the Attorney General's Office in Kabul.

34. On 22 April, under the rubric of the announcement launching their spring offensive, the Taliban released a statement instructing the group's fighters to avoid civilian casualties. The statement listed a number of protected facilities, including schools, universities and health centres, as well as public welfare projects. Following the Taliban statement and a series of deliberate attacks on civilians claimed by the Taliban, UNAMA issued two public statements condemning the attacks against the Attorney General's Office on 10 May and against a guest house in Kabul and the Department of Haj and Religious Endowment in Hilmand on 13 May. Both statements reiterated that international humanitarian law, which binds all parties to the conflict in Afghanistan, including the Taliban, prohibits attacks against civilians and civilian locations. On 14 May, the Taliban stated they did not accept any foreigner as falling under the definition of "civilian", but did not address the issue of Afghan civilians killed in any of the recent attacks.

35. The United Nations-led country task force on monitoring and reporting on children and armed conflict documented 523 child casualties (135 killed and 388 injured) in 254 incidents between 15 February and 30 April. Child casualties increased 2 per cent compared with the previous reporting period. Most child casualties continued to be caused during ground engagements between pro-Government forces and anti-Government elements (270 casualties), followed by improvised explosive devices attacks (124 casualties) and explosive remnants of war (80 casualties). Children were especially vulnerable in the southern region of the country, which witnessed 27 per cent of the total child casualties reported, owing mainly to an increase in ground engagements. Anti-Government elements were responsible for 46 per cent of the total child casualties, while pro-Government forces were responsible for 18 per cent. The remaining 36 per cent of casualties were unattributed. On 14 March, the Government of Afghanistan submitted to the United Nations its fourth progress report on the implementation of the children and armed conflict action plan. In its report, the Government highlighted steps taken during the period from 1 January to 31 December 2014 to advance implementation of the action plan and the annexes on reporting on killing, maiming and sexual violence against children.

36. On 19 April, UNAMA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights launched a report entitled "Justice through the

eyes of Afghan women: cases of violence against women addressed through mediation and court adjudication", featuring documentation of the significant use of mediation, rather than court adjudication, to resolve cases and recommendations for reforms to improve women's access to justice.

37. The killing of a 27-year-old woman on 19 March by a crowd in Kabul City, over false allegations that she had burned a copy of the Koran, sparked public outrage and widespread condemnation across Afghanistan and internationally. The Government condemned the attack and launched an investigation. On 6 May, the primary court in Kabul convicted 12 civilians of the murder, sentencing 4 of them to death. All court decisions are currently subject to appeal. On 19 May, the verdict for the 19 police officers charged was announced, with 11 officers sentenced to one year in prison for dereliction of duty and the remaining eight acquitted owing to lack of evidence. Afghan and international human rights and legal defence groups expressed serious concerns about the legal process for all convictions stating that they failed to comply with Afghan and international fair trial standards.

38. Speaking at a 5 March event ahead of International Women's Day, President Ghani emphasized the commitment of the Government to bringing fundamental and sustainable change for Afghan women, including for participation in decision-making, economic empowerment, education and health. The United Nations supported outreach activities across the country around International Women's Day, on the global theme "Empower women; empower humanity". From 9 to 20 March, the United Nations supported the participation of a Government of Afghanistan delegation to the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which was held at United Nations Headquarters.

39. During the reporting period, the Government outlined a proposal for a national plan for elimination of torture as part of its response to a UNAMA report, released on 25 February, on the treatment of conflict-related detainees in Afghan custody. The proposed national plan, to be overseen by the Office of National Security Adviser and the Second Vice-President, includes regulatory reforms, prevention measures and training. The Second Vice-President informed UNAMA and Afghan civil society organizations on 29 April that a committee with their participation would be formed to draft an action plan and monitor its implementation.

IV. Implementation of the Kabul process and coordination of development assistance

40. During the period under review, President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah engaged directly on the development agenda, requesting presentations from major donors, international financial institutions and the United Nations on their current development portfolios. The review of the portfolios and the annual Ministry of Finance-led development cooperation dialogue process are expected to inform the future development strategies and policies of the Government. On 8 March, the United Nations submitted its portfolio review to the Office of the President. It is expected that the proposed United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2015-2019, endorsed in principle by the former administration on 6 May 2014 but pending approval by the new Government, will be informed by the current deliberations. Thus far, the Government has expressed its intention to consolidate the current 22 national priority programmes.

41. On 3 April, the Cabinet approved the proposed plan of the Ministry of Finance for reform implementation and monitoring. Drawing on the paper entitled "Realizing self-reliance", which was shared at the December 2014 London Conference, the plan consists of 52 measures, of which 26 are identified as priorities for action within six months. The Ministry of Finance engaged with line ministries to advance the plan.

42. The economic and fiscal situation in Afghanistan remained challenging. According to World Bank data, Afghanistan achieved a 2 per cent growth rate in 2014, with a rate of 2.5 per cent forecast for 2015. As a consequence of poor economic performance, fiscal vulnerabilities were likely to remain high in 2015. According to World Bank analysis, there was a need for dramatically improved revenue performance relative to 2014 in order to avoid a higher than budgeted fiscal gap in 2015. Furthermore, it was emphasized that economic recovery required the implementation of reforms to address revenue and corruption and governance concerns, particularly those affecting confidence in the economy.

43. On 20 March, the International Monetary Fund announced a nine-month staff-monitored programme, aimed at addressing fiscal and banking vulnerabilities, preserving international reserves and low debt, maintaining low inflation and strengthening competitiveness. In response to the programme, the Government significantly increased some customs duties and the enforcement of income tax laws. The Ministry of Finance indicated that initial revenue projections were 4 per cent above the targets agreed with the International Monetary Fund and that the Government was able to cover its planned expenditures, including salaries and operational costs.

44. The Government of Afghanistan continued to pursue the development of extractive industries as a significant economic opportunity. In response to an 8 February request by the Government, the United Nations provided support in the areas of policy development, regulatory capacities and public consultations. It also supported the Ministry of Commerce and Industries in conducting an archaeological screening in Hajigk, a priority area for exploration. At the board meeting of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, on 14 and 15 April, Afghanistan was granted an 18-month candidacy extension to join the Initiative, in keeping with a commitment to the Government's reform agenda.

45. Regarding the Government's efforts to address illicit land usurpation, on 19 March, the United Nations released a report with recommendations on developing oversight and accountability in the land distribution framework, including a centralized land management system. In April, the Supreme Court and the Second Vice-President agreed that responsibility for land titles would be transferred to the Afghanistan Independent Land Authority. Established by presidential decree on 8 April, the High Council on Land and Water convened for the first time on 5 May, chaired by President Ghani. President Ghani expressed his commitment to addressing land usurpation as a factor having an impact on socioeconomic development. The Ministry of Commerce and Industries was assisted by UNAMA in developing proposed legal amendments aimed at strengthening the environment for business and trade.

46. On 26 April, the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee released its seventh biannual report, covering the period from July to December 2014, and a compendium of the status of implementation of its

323 recommendations, covering an array of anti-corruption issues of relevance to both the Government and the international community. In the report, the Committee noted that 53 recommendations had been completely implemented, 149 recommendations were under implementation or had been partially implemented, 33 recommendations had not yet been implemented and 88 recommendations had been recently issued, their implementation status not yet reviewed.

47. At a 12 March meeting of the International Police Coordination Board, the Minister of Interior launched a strategy for the professionalization of the police, including measures for increased accountability and improved relations between police and communities. During the reporting period, the United Nations continued to advocate for accountable policing, to build capacity and to support the professionalization of women officers. As at 28 April, 52 police women councils were established, 12 of which were within the Ministry of Interior directorates, 10 in Kabul police districts and 30 in the other provinces. The Ministry of Interior was assisted by the United Nations in the provision of literacy classes to the police, with 4,989 officers, including 202 women, currently enrolled in programmes across 19 provinces.

V. Humanitarian assistance

48. The humanitarian situation remained challenging owing to a combination of conflict and extreme weather conditions, with continued population displacement and increased vulnerability levels among affected communities. Relief operations reached some 8,827 families affected by natural disasters, and progress was made in key areas, such as immunization programmes. However, acute food insecurity and access to vulnerable populations, as well as the safety of humanitarian workers, remained major sources of concern. At meetings in Islamabad and Tehran, significant progress was made on the formulation of comprehensive return and reintegration strategies for Afghan refugees, whose levels of voluntary return continued to remain high compared with 2014.

49. At the 25th meeting of the Tripartite Commission for the Voluntary Repatriation of Afghan Refugees from Pakistan, held in Islamabad on 11 March, representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees agreed to support a comprehensive return and reintegration strategy for Afghan refugees. The strategy would include a process of voluntary repatriation and reintegration, taking into account Afghanistan's absorption capacity, while Pakistan would agree to register all undocumented Afghan migrants. As a result, Afghanistan established a high national commission on migration, chaired by the President, to deal with overall displacement issues, including refugee returns and reintegration.

50. On 19 May, the fourth meeting of the Quadripartite Steering Committee on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries comprised of Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Pakistan and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was held in Tehran. The role that Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan have played in hosting large Afghan refugee communities was acknowledged and the need for joint planning to include approaches to the issue of economic migrants was emphasized.

51. The levels of voluntary return of Afghan refugees and undocumented Afghans continued to remain high compared with the same period in 2014. The overall rate of undocumented Afghans returning from Pakistan through the Torkham and Spin Boldak border crossing points stands at 172 per cent of total returns and deportations in the same period in 2014. From 1 January to 30 April, 149,555 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran (Islamic Republic of) (84,502) and Pakistan (65,053), compared with 76,238 during the same period in 2014. A total of 75,027 undocumented Afghans were deported from Iran (Islamic Republic of) (68,094) and Pakistan (6,933), compared with 68,619 during the same period in 2014. During the first four months of 2015, 21,505 refugees returned under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees voluntary repatriation programme, compared with 3,817 during the same period in 2014, of which 95 per cent were from Pakistan. It was estimated that 30 to 40 per cent of returnees from Pakistan were in need of assistance. However, owing to funding shortfalls, only 10 per cent can be assisted. Beyond short-term needs, assistance with durable livelihoods and reintegration support is required.

52. Afghanistan continued to host a significant number of refugees in Khost and Paktika Provinces who had fled North Waziristan, Pakistan, owing to military operations. Following a United Nations reverification exercise in both provinces, a 15 per cent decrease in the number of registered refugees since 31 January was recorded. As at 21 April, there were 35,252 families, totalling 243,248 individuals registered as refugees (175,929 in Khost, 67,319 in Paktika). Humanitarian agencies have continued to provide them with assistance.

53. As at 30 April, the Task Force on Internally Displaced Persons, co-chaired by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation and UNHCR, recorded 35,800 persons displaced as a result of conflict in 2015. The highest number of displaced persons were recorded in Faryab and Hilmand Provinces, with 519 families (3,206 individuals) and 374 families (2,938), respectively. During the reporting period, Kunduz Province emerged as the primary area of concern, with conflict between Government forces and anti-Government elements leading to large-scale displacement. Humanitarian actors continue to conduct joint assessments of families who have petitioned the Departments of Refugees and Repatriation for assistance, with 8,558 families assessed to date, of which 3,640 families have been verified as conflict-displaced persons in need of assistance. From March to May, the United Nations used its extensive logistical network to assist approximately 238,000 conflict-displaced persons with an estimated 7,800 metric tons of food.

54. Mine action partners, coordinated by the United Nations, cleared 46 minefields and three battlefields in 14 Afghan communities in the first quarter of 2015. Funding may not be sufficient, however, to meet the 2015 targets of the workplan under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. It is estimated that 4,025 minefields and 245 battlefields remain, affecting 1,603 communities across 255 districts, threatening the lives and livelihoods of Afghan civilians. Working with NATO Resolute Support Mission, the United Nations continued to address explosive hazard contamination, including firing ranges, from operations of the former International Security Assistance Force.

55. During the reporting period, 24 out of 34 provinces were affected by extreme weather, including avalanches, heavy snowfall and flooding. A total of 290 people were reported killed, 97 injured and 9,009 houses damaged or destroyed. The

national disaster management committee and humanitarian agencies continued efforts to respond to the food and non-food needs of all affected populations with available stocks.

56. Preliminary assessments conducted by the food security and agriculture cluster during the reporting period indicated that the purchasing power of vulnerable households had deteriorated by approximately 10 per cent in most parts of the country in the past five years. This is expected to be compounded by high levels of acute food insecurity among displaced households owing to conflict or natural disasters, as well as returning refugees and existing poor households. According to indications, continued severe food insecurity will affect approximately 1.4 million people across the country.

57. Polio eradication efforts continued to face access challenges in southern and eastern Afghanistan, as well as in the south-eastern and western regions. Since the lifting of a temporary access ban by armed non-state actors in Hilmand Province in early February, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative conducted supplementary polio immunization activities. Despite those efforts, the first case of polio in Afghanistan for 2015 was identified in January in Reg District, Hilmand Province. Between January and May, one National Immunization Day and seven vaccination campaigns were held, including in newly accessible areas in Panjwaj District, Kandahar Province; Barg-i Matal District, Nuristan Province; and Lal Pur District, Nangarhar Province. During the reporting period, polio campaigners focused on low-performing districts in southern, eastern, western and south-eastern Afghanistan, leading to successful campaigns in Nangarhar, Kunar, Laghaman, Kandahar, Hilmand, Paktika, and Farah Provinces.

58. Despite the increase in security incidents during the first quarter of 2015, the volume of incidents against humanitarian-related personnel, assets and facilities and violations against health facilities remained consistent with the same period in 2014. The United Nations global monitoring framework recorded a total of 74 incidents between 1 January and 30 April, of which 52 affected non-governmental organizations. The incidents included the killing of 11 aid workers, with another 10 injured. In addition, 54 aid workers were abducted and 2 arrested. There were 11 incidents recorded against health facilities or workers and 2 against demining sites.

59. As at 30 April, humanitarian funding for Afghanistan reached $172 million, of which $129.5 million is designated for activities foreseen within the Humanitarian Strategic Response Plan and $24.6 million for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. As at 1 June the Humanitarian Strategic Response Plan was 27 per cent funded. Ninety-three per cent of the designated funds of the Plan are allocated to agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system and 7 per cent to non-governmental organizations. The common humanitarian pooled fund has received $18.3 million. As a result of funding constraints, shortfalls in available food supplies are anticipated in June and will have a serious impact on the humanitarian response to address acute malnutrition. In order for operations to continue throughout 2015, the World Food Programme is conducting an urgent appeal for $65.6 million. That funding would serve to support the humanitarian needs of thousands of people recently displaced by conflict in a number of provinces, notably Kunduz, as well as other emerging humanitarian needs.

VI. Counter-narcotics

60. On 21 April, the socioeconomic analysis portion of the Afghanistan Opium Survey 2014 was released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The report analysed the opiate economy and the factors and determinants driving opium poppy cultivation. Despite estimated potential gross value of opiates in Afghanistan decreasing by almost 9 per cent to $2.84 billion since the previous year, opiates still account for the equivalent of 13 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. A highly attractive crop to farmers, opium cultivation in many rural communities remains high, accounting for 36 per cent of the income of farmers who cultivate it. The price decrease in the average farm-gate price of dry opium in 2014 was also reflected in a decrease in heroin prices both within Afghanistan and across borders, although existing information does not show a major change in demand in the main opiate-consuming countries.

61. During the period under review, drug crop eradication led by provincial governors was reported in nine provinces in Afghanistan, with a total of 3,042 ha of opium poppy being eradicated as at 10 May. Initial assessments indicate security incidents during the eradication efforts are lower, compared with previous years, owing to the efforts of the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics to improve coordination with the other ministries with a security remit. Five members of the security forces have been killed and 16 personnel wounded since the start of the eradication operations in 2015.

62. Afghan law enforcement authorities also conducted a total of 841 counter-narcotics operations during the reporting period, resulting in the seizure of approximately 14,576 kg of narcotics. This included 898 kg of heroin, 8,607 kg of opium, and 5,071 kg of cannabis. In addition, 504 kg of solid precursor chemicals and 1,540 L of liquid precursor chemicals were seized. Two heroin manufacturing laboratories were dismantled, 818 suspects were arrested, and 187 vehicles and 152 weapons were seized. During those operations, two members of the security forces were killed and three were wounded. The efforts of the border liaison offices that support operations with Afghan, Iranian, Pakistani, Tajik and Uzbek border police operations collectively resulted in the seizure of 3,027 kg of narcotics within the overall seizure total.

VII. Mission support

63. UNAMA has continued to ensure effective use of its resources to accomplish cost-efficient operations in support of mandated activities throughout the country. UNAMA preparations for the roll-out of the next phase of Umoja are on track.

VIII. Observations

64. The formation of the National Unity Government is nearly complete. After a long and challenging process, the appointment of all ministers and the formalization of the Office of the Chief Executive and the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers are important achievements. The development and implementation of 100-day action plans for each ministry, now under way, should help to realize shared national

objectives. With the Cabinet all but in place, it is imperative that the Government accelerate its reform agenda.

65. The creation of the Special Commission on Electoral Reform demonstrates the commitment of the National Unity Government to electoral reforms, as provided for in the 21 September 2014 agreement. Comprehensive electoral reforms will be crucial for restoring the faith of the Afghan people in the democratic process. That is a matter of urgency since, as according to the Afghan Constitution, parliamentary elections, as well as those for district councils, should already have taken place. I encourage the Government and relevant bodies to launch the electoral reform process and determine the electoral calendar. It will also be important to provide certainty on the role of the lower house of the National Assembly after the conclusion of its term on 22 June. The United Nations looks forward to engaging with the Commission and stands ready to provide advice.

66. The priority actions identified by the Government under the "Realizing Self-reliance" agenda, including to advance reforms, strengthen public accountability and promote economic growth are encouraging. In that regard, 100-day action plans have the potential to build the necessary public confidence and buy-in. Continuing to provide international assistance to Afghanistan will be necessary in the short and longer terms. The agreement on the International Monetary Fund programme represents an important step towards securing longer-term access by the Government to financial support.

67. The intensification of the conflict across the country hampered progress across a range of issues and exacted a terrible toll on the civilian population. I am deeply concerned by the dramatic increase in civilian casualties, despite public commitments by the parties to protect civilians. Attacks deliberately targeting civilians are strictly prohibited under international humanitarian law. During the reporting period anti-Government elements repeatedly attacked civilians working in the justice system, a deplorable targeting of civilian personnel. The conflict continues to displace significant numbers of civilians, in addition to those in Afghanistan displaced by military operations in Pakistan.

68. I am encouraged by the constructive dialogue between the Governments of Afghanistan and host countries on the formulation of comprehensive return and reintegration strategies for Afghan refugees. With the growing issue of internal displacement in Afghanistan, however, there will be a need to ensure national capacities to manage the volume of returns. The support of Member States to address the immediate and long-term needs of returnees will be necessary.

69. It is my grave concern that the humanitarian situation will deteriorate further if fighting intensifies. In order for relief efforts to succeed, the safety of humanitarian workers and access to vulnerable individuals remain of critical importance. All parties to the conflict must respect their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian laws. The generous contributions by Member States have supported efforts to prevent and alleviate the suffering of thousands of ordinary Afghans. Nevertheless, I note with concern that humanitarian funding is currently lower than it was at the time in 2014, while the needs are significantly higher and continue to increase.

70. I continue to be concerned about violence against women and the management of such cases by the criminal justice system. The public murder of a woman by a

mob of men on 19 March in broad daylight in the capital underscored the continuing threat of violence against women. However, the outrage expressed peacefully in the wake of the killing by countless ordinary Afghans was unparalleled and spurred discussions in Afghan society on the necessity of addressing those issues. It is essential to the credibility of the justice system that allegations of abuse and mistreatment are thoroughly investigated and appropriately prosecuted so that those responsible can be held accountable. Securing a robust and transparent criminal justice system, with due regard to protecting the rights of women, remains vital.

71. Afghanistan continues to deepen its interaction with its neighbours in respect of building regional confidence and connectivity. The increased engagement during the reporting period between the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan, including public declarations stating their commitment to work together for peace and prosperity, is encouraging. Visits by President Ghani to India and Iran (Islamic Republic of) pointed to the importance accorded by his Government to those key partners as well. During my upcoming visit to Central Asia, I will underline the importance of strengthening trade and exchange with Afghanistan in order to boost shared economic growth and regional stability.

72. Afghans desperately want respite from the ever-present violence that has such a damaging impact on their lives. At local events and meetings, they continue to express their desire for peace and its realization through dialogue. The Government of Afghanistan has stated its commitment to engage in talks with the Taliban, who have indicated their interest in a political process. An essential element that is missing, however, is the willingness of the armed opposition to meet the Government in direct talks. Without that engagement, no meaningful progress towards a peace negotiation will be possible. The United Nations will continue to provide support in that regard, in close consultation with the Government of Afghanistan.

73. In reference to the request by the Security Council that I conduct an examination of the role, structure and activities of all United Nations entities in Afghanistan, it was recently agreed to establish a Tripartite Commission, comprised of representatives of the Government, the international donor community, and UNAMA and affiliated agencies, funds and programmes. While that discussion is at its early stages, I am confident that it has the potential to be fruitful.

74. Finally, I thank all the United Nations personnel in Afghanistan and my Special Representative, Nicholas Haysom, for their commitment under challenging conditions, to support a more peaceful, prosperous and stable Afghanistan.

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Macroeconomic policy questions: international trade and development

Sustainable development

Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Security Council
Seventieth year

Identical letters dated 8 June 2015 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the recent decisions by the United States of America and the European Union to extend unilateral coercive economic measures against Syria for an additional year.

The United States administration and the European Union continue to ignore calls from within Syria and from the international community and United Nations entities, all of them stressing the urgent need to help Syrians to overcome their current troubles and strengthen their capacity to withstand the vicious terrorist onslaught against their lives, livelihoods, civilization, and social and cultural fabric. On 6 May 2015, the United States administration extended its unilateral coercive economic measures against Syria for an additional year. Those measures were initially imposed on Syria by the previous administration in 2003. They have targeted a number of vital sectors in Syria, including health, trade, banking, financial transactions, the private sector and the import of spare parts for passenger planes. The Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union also extended its

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unilateral coercive economic measures, which it imposed in 2011, for an additional year through 1 June 2016. The European measures also affect sectors that are vital for Syrians' needs and livelihoods and for development, the creation of decent jobs and maintenance of the country's economy. Those areas include oil, electricity, health, trade, banking and the private sector.

By continuing to adopt such illegal policies, the European Union and the United States have given clear proof of the following points:

1. They have no respect for the authority of the United Nations or its Charter. The latter prohibits such measures, which reach beyond the territorial borders of Member States to threaten the sovereignty of other States. They set no store by United Nations resolutions, in particular General Assembly resolution 68/200, which prohibits the imposition of such measures because of their negative impact on sustainable development and trade in the targeted States, and General Assembly resolution 69/180, which calls for the immediate cessation of any economic, financial or trade measures against developing States because they hinder the well-being and full enjoyment of human rights of the populations of those States, in particular women and children. The American and European sides also are also deliberately ignoring United Nations reports that have confirmed clearly the catastrophic impact of such measures on the livelihoods and well-being of Syrians and on their country's economy, including reports from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

2. American and European claims of wanting to help Syrians and provide for their humanitarian needs during the current crisis are contradicted by the actual facts, which demonstrate clearly that the American and European sides are deliberately inflaming the situation in Syria and exacerbating the deterioration of living conditions for Syrians. Their unilateral coercive economic measures are aimed at the very Syrian national capacities, resources and institutions that are required to meet the needs of citizens and implement humanitarian response plans and development plans. Indeed, the American and European measures go against United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 2139 (2014). Those resolutions all urge stakeholders to support a humanitarian response for Syrians, instead of placing economic obstacles in their path or worsening their conditions in order to pressure them into making different choices.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic condemns the American and European decisions to extend unilateral coercive economic measures against Syria for an additional year. It considers those measures to be a blatant effort to inflame the situation in Syria and cause the already difficult living conditions of the Syrian people to deteriorate even further. Those decisions reflect one aspect of the misguided approach being taken by the United States and Europe to the situation in Syria. Worst of all, the United States and the European countries have for many years denied the terrorist threat to Syria and the region. Some of those countries are implicated in sponsoring terrorism themselves; others merely turn a blind eye while regional governments do so. The Syrian Government calls on the free voices among the States members of the European Union to put a stop to the hostile approach of the Governments of France and Britain, which violates the resolutions of the General Assembly; Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 1624 (2005), 1989

(2011), 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014) and 2199 (2015); international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law; and European principles and values.

The Syrian Arab Republic stresses that any talk by the United States of America and the European Union about stepping up humanitarian assistance to Syrians is no more than empty rhetoric, and proof of public hypocrisy campaigns whose actual effect is to expose Syrians to all forms of danger. The Syrian Government holds those States responsible for the worsening humanitarian conditions in Syria, which stem from their ongoing sponsorship of armed terrorist groups and from certain European States' efforts to burnish the groups' image through various forms of direct and indirect support.

Notwithstanding all the fraudulent claims and systematic disinformation, and despite the enormous negative impact of the European and American unilateral coercive economic measures imposed on the Government and people of Syria, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic continues to provide over 80 per cent of the humanitarian assistance reaching its citizens. It is fulfilling all of its responsibilities with respect to shelter, food, transportation, medicine, health, education and energy for its citizens, who are victims of terrorism and of the European and American unilateral coercive economic measures.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter issued as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 17 (a), 19, 68 (b) and 69 (a), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Letter dated 9 June 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 9 June 2015, addressed to you by Mehmet Dânâ, Representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (see annex).

I would be grateful if the text of the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 42, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Y. Halit **Çevik**
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 9 June 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I am writing in response to the letter dated 26 May 2015 addressed to you by the Greek Cypriot representative in New York and circulated as a document of the General Assembly and of the Security Council (A/69/913-S/2015/379), which, yet again, contains false assertions similar to those made in his previous letters. To set the record straight, I would like to bring the following to your kind attention.

At the outset, regarding the claims of so-called "infringements of international air traffic regulations" and "violations of the national airspace of the Republic of Cyprus by Turkey", I wish, once again, to reiterate that flights within the sovereign airspace of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus take place with the full knowledge and consent of the relevant authorities of the State, over which the Greek Cypriot Administration in South Cyprus has no jurisdiction or right of say whatsoever. The civil aviation authority of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is the sole competent authority to provide air traffic and aeronautical information services within its own national airspace. As to the remarks regarding the issuance of an anti-notice to airmen, it must be underlined that activities within the Ercan Advisory Airspace that require notices to airmen are carried out in coordination with the relevant authorities of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, in accordance with article 3 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention).

Similarly, the assertion raised in the letter regarding the Turkish Cypriot ports is also baseless, given the fact that the Greek Cypriot Administration has no jurisdiction or right of say over Northern Cyprus. This constitutes yet another attempt aimed at distorting the facts and the realities of the island. As noted in our previous letters, such allegations are based on the false and unlawful claim that the sovereignty of the Greek Cypriot Administration extends over the whole island, including the territory, national airspace and territorial waters of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. This pretentious contention by the Greek Cypriot side ignores the present realities on the ground, namely, the existence of two independent, self-governing States on the island of Cyprus, each exercising sovereignty and jurisdiction within its respective territory.

As to the repeated false allegations regarding the Ercan Airport in the North, it should, once again, be underlined that the technologically up-to-date Ercan Area Control Centre and Airport in North Cyprus have been providing regular, reliable and safe air traffic services since the Greek Cypriot refusal in 1977 to provide air traffic services in the northern part of the island, in line with its isolation policy that has been imposed on the Turkish Cypriot people. Ever since, all flights within the sovereign airspace of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus take place with the full knowledge and permission of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Civil Aviation Department, over which the Greek Cypriot Administration in South Cyprus has no jurisdiction or control.

The legislation of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on aeronautical safety meets all standards and recommendations of the International Civil Aviation Organization, providing safe and swift navigation of aircraft landing at or taking off

from Ercan Airport as well as using the airspace of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. All airports in Northern Cyprus are in full conformity with international standards and necessary investments have been made to keep up with the developing technology. The number of air traffic controllers has been increased, in accordance with the increasing number of flights over the years, and the Ercan Area Control Centre is in regular and close cooperation with the Ankara Area Control Centre to ensure the safe conduct of all flights in the region. In 2014 alone, the number of passengers that used Ercan Airport stood at almost 3,250,000, while the projected number of passengers for 2015 is 3,500,000. Moreover, in 2014, around 25,000 planes used Ercan Airport for arrival and departure and 200,000 planes used the Ercan Advisory Airspace. These numbers are expected to be around 27,000 and 210,000, respectively, for 2015. In this respect, it must be stressed that the Turkish Cypriot side is committed to upholding the highest standards in the field of air navigation safety, in full conformity with the Chicago Convention, and is ready to cooperate with the Greek Cypriot authorities on this very important issue.

Continuous attempts by the Greek Cypriot side, through often-repeated false statements, to confer legitimacy upon the long-defunct "Republic of Cyprus" are futile because the Turkish Cypriot people will never give in to their unjust demands. What would indeed contribute to a better atmosphere on the island would be for the Greek Cypriot side to put an end to misappropriating for itself the rights and responsibilities that it does not legally have and to cease its hostile acts against the Turkish Cypriot people. Moreover, the Greek Cypriot Administration should, once again, be reminded that its counterpart is, and has always been, the Turkish Cypriot side, not Turkey, and that its insistent denial of the Turkish Cypriot rights in the north of the island does not bode well for the prospects of finding a just and lasting settlement of the Cyprus conflict in line with the established United Nations parameters, which envisage a new partnership on the basis of the political equality of the two peoples of the island within the framework of a bizonal, bicommunal federation with two constituent States of equal status.

Availing myself of this opportunity, I would like to call upon the Greek Cypriot side to discontinue such counterproductive propaganda tactics and focus on the negotiating process so that the current window of opportunity for a fair and durable comprehensive settlement can be seized. As the Turkish Cypriot side, we are committed to maintaining our constructive and positive stance within the context of your good offices mission in Cyprus and encourage our Greek Cypriot neighbours to follow a similar path.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 42, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mehmet **Dânâ**
Representative
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus